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MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
EDWARD J. FRANCIS, TOOK'S COURT,
CHANCERY LANE, E.C.

MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR.

A Novel.

BY

FRANK LEE BENEDICT,

AUTHOR OF 'MISS DOROTHY'S CHARGE,' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

SAMUEL TINSLEY,

10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

1874.

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251. b. 432.

Dedication.

To J. T. HART.

Dear Friend,

I dedicate to you this book, written in Florence during the past autumn made so pleasant to me by your companionship. It will reach you at the time when the work to which you have devoted ten years, approaches completion. The art-lovers and art-students of our day have already pronounced their verdict thereupon, so that I only repeat what has been said and written scores of times when I express the certainty that, once chiselled into marble perfection, it will be acknowledged not only by our own generation, but by all time to come, that the sculptor has equalled the genius as well as the patience of the old Greek masters.

Frank Lee Benedict.

St. Dalmas di Tenda, Italy,
August, 1874.

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MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR.

CHAPTER I.

LA MALADÈYRE.

IT was a gorgeous September afternoon. The steamboat neared Lausanne, on its way up from Geneva to Villeneuve, and at length the far-famed lake began to redeem the promise held out by its reputation. Elizabeth Crauford sat on the deck, talked with her father, watched the people, and kept to herself a certain sense of disappointment which had been growing from Geneva to Ouchy. But once beyond the pretty little watering-place, with gloomy Lausanne frowning on the height above, the whole scene changed. The hills towered into mountains; in the far distance Mont Blanc

showed like a pinnacle of yellow flame. Here the real beauty of the lake commences, increasing constantly, till, with the sight of Vevay and Clarens, its full perfection is reached, deserving to be raved over and to have poetry written about it even in this scoffing, materialistic age.

The sun was setting as they gained Vevay. Behind stretched a lofty mountain range, glorious with rainbow tints. In front rose the mighty Dent-du-Midi, withits eternal crown of snow, the Jamin peak and lesser crags guarding the head of the lake like giant sentinels. Another landing—a village which is in reality a bourg of Vevay, though taking a name from some picturesque ruins near the water.

"Perhaps it would have been better to leave the boat here," Mr. Crauford said; then, with characteristic vacillation, added immediately, "But we may as well go on to Clarens; La Maladèyre is nearer there, in fact."

Elizabeth was too well accustomed to unexpected propositions and their withdrawal on the part of her father, whether in regard to journeys or other matters, to pay much attention. She was gazing up and down the lake—watching the magic light—taking in every feature of the beautiful panorama. But she did not forget to answer. Mr. Crauford always waited for a reply

to his suggestions. As a rule, the response, whatever it might be, did not exactly please him; but one of some sort must be given. So now Elizabeth said dutifully,—

"Yes, papa."

Mr. Crauford neither noticed nor heard. He leaned over the railing, and looked earnestly out toward the left bank, close to which the boat ran. He had not seen the spot since he and his wife came here during their wedding journey. Mrs. Crauford had been dead many a day, and her widowed spouse was past fifty; still he liked to indulge in romance of a lachrymose and uncomfortable nature. He had determined to bring his daughter to visit the place in which he had been so happy, or thought he had, though he and his bride had quarrelled a good deal on the banks of the famous Lake Leman, after the habit of newly-married people, wherever they may chance to wander. He wanted to spend a month in the very house in which he and his lost angel had dwelt, and, writing to secure it, found himself obliged to pay a high price for the indulgence of his fancy. It was probable that he would be wretched, and would render his daughter, his faithful Gervais, and everybody about him, as miserable as he well could.

There is no companion more to be dreaded on a journey than a man doing romance, unless it be one who means to write poetry about the marvellous scenes; they both invariably scold and find fault from morning to night.

Presently the boat passed a point of land jutting out into the lake, covered with trees, two great weeping-willows and three tall poplars conspicuous among them. Mr. Crauford pointed to the roof of a house visible amid the greenery, and spoke for the first time in many minutes.

"That is La Maladèyre, my dear."

Elizabeth looked and tried to feel sentimental, and to fancy her father and mother there in their youth; but the fitting poetic sadness refused to make itself felt; it never will when one tries to call it up. Somehow, her vagrant fancy would only picture her living parent in a hideous red and yellow dressing-gown, which he donned in the seclusion of his chamber, and her mother taking physic out of a large spoon. She had enough pleasanter recollections of that dead mother, but they refused to keep her company now.

The Clarens landing was reached; beyond lay Verney, Terretêt, and the Castle of Chillon; a little further sweep of water, then the vast mountains closed in the scene. It was almost

dusk, but Elizabeth could perceive that Clarens was as unlike the Clarens of Rousseau as could well be imagined.

"It is not far down," Mr. Crauford said, as he and his daughter stood comfortably watching Gervais and Margot struggle with porters over the luggage. "We might walk, but we can easily get a carriage," he added, before she could agree to his first proposition.

Gervais learned that the road along the lake was undergoing repairs; it would be wise to take another which wound among the hills from Montreux to Vevay. Six times Mr. Crauford changed his mind, but Gervais ordered the coachman to go on to the upper road. He had not wavered in his determination, "though he let his master talk," as he expressed himself later to Margot. It was a pretty route, among trees and sheltered farm-houses, a spick-and-span new castle standing where the *bosquet de Julie* used to wave. From thence a rapid descent between the chestnut trees, a sharp turn, an arch under the railway to traverse, then the lake road and the pretty *campagne* Mr. Crauford had pointed out to his daughter.

The carriage passed through the iron gates, just within which stood a picturesque chalet, rolled on a short distance, and drew up before

the entrance to the villa. A square, rather gloomy house, much older than it looked, but pleasant and comfortable within, though, after the fashion of Swiss dwellings, the best room in it was taken up by the kitchen. There was a pretty *salon*, a library beyond, both looking toward the chalet; on the other side of the hall a dining-room, with a view of the lake and the Dent-du-Midi. Above stairs a sleeping chamber and dressing-room for Elizabeth; next that a large apartment for her father, and a glorious out-look from the windows.

They had dined early at Geneva. Mr. Crauford met one of his numerous and sudden neuralgic headaches at the house-door (they were always lying in wait for him in the most unexpected places), so he retired at once to his chamber, thinking himself saddened by memories of the past; in reality, very cross and fretful, scolding Gervais as long as that patient adherent would stay to listen.

Elizabeth escaped from the house, and the hospitable propositions of its good-natured mistress, promising to have some tea later, and went out to survey the spot which was to be her home for a few weeks. In front, a narrow lawn, thick with chestnut and pine-

trees; to the right the chalet; at the left a tangle of shrubbery, a little vineyard, and an *espalier*, where the great Duchess pears grew rich and golden, clumps of rose-bushes and laurustinus, two vine-covered arbours, then a winding path to the back of the dwelling. A broad sweep of greensward, dotted with noble trees, sloped down to the massive stone wall, against which the waves beat and moaned with a force that made one feel as if upon the sea-shore. In one place the land jutted out in a point; the basin thus formed made a harbour for a sail-boat, and had a bit of outer wall to protect it. Beyond the landing-steps rose one of the grand old willows; at the extremity of the point towered a poplar, its trunk encircled by a bench.

The moon was coming up, tinging the snow-crown of the Dent-du-Midi, and casting a broad line of golden radiance across the waters. Away stretched the beautiful lake; far in the distance streaks of daylight yet lingered; great masses of white clouds sailed slowly up the sky; the air was soft and warm, as if the sheltered valley had been deep in Italy.

Then Elizabeth walked back to look at the chalet—a long building, standing upon a declivity which brought the ground-floor of the

front part on a level with the upper story of the back. A wide gallery ran along the side, roofed by the overhanging eaves; at the back was a flight of stairs. A home beneath the building (of course) for the cows, and a paved space between the chalet and villa, with a fountain sending its jet into a huge stone basin, which served as a drinking-place for the cattle, and a convenience for the wife of the *fermier*—established in some rooms next the cow-house—to wash her clothes, Swiss fashion, in cold water.

There were lights in the upper room of the chalet; a young girl was pacing up and down the long gallery, humming snatches of French songs. Elizabeth stopped under the shadow of the trees to look at her, but it was too dark to distinguish more than a tall, slight figure wrapped in a loose white mantle. Presently, through one of the open windows, came a peevish voice, calling in French,—

"It is that thou art resolved to take cold, I suppose! Come in, I entreat thee, my child."

"It is not cold in the least," replied the clear young tones; "and I do not wish to come in. Thou art disagreeable, mamma, and Monsieur La Tour is disagreeable likewise. I prefer the gallery and my own society."

Expostulations from the peevish voice, entreaties from elderly masculine tones, but the girl turned impatiently and resumed her march. Elizabeth walked away, smiling at the brief dialogue, and entered the house.

While she drank her tea, Madame Bocher informed her that the apartment in the chalet was occupied by a lady and her daughter. Their name was L'Estrange. The mother was an invalid—here for her health. She would not be here or anywhere long. Well, we must all die! Mademoiselle Nathalie was to marry Monsieur La Tour. He was a little elderly man with a wig, and Mademoiselle laughed at him a great deal. She was a blithe young thing, was Mademoiselle. Madame was *dévote*, *bigote* even—natural enough, since she must die soon. But she was odd, very odd! However, Madame Bocher was not one to gossip, and the lady paid her bills regularly, and Monsieur le Curé came several times a week from Vevay to visit her. Of course, under other circumstances, Madame might wish to be rid of her lodger—nothing hurt a house like having a death happen in it—but Madame's lease of villa and chalet would expire in the spring, and who could be cruel enough to turn out the poor invalid when she had a fancy to stay?

"I hear a carriage," Elizabeth said at last, more to interrupt Madame's torrent of talk than because there was anything extraordinary in the sounds she mentioned.

"It is Monsieur La Tour driving away: he stops at the Hôtel du Lac, the grand hotel by the landing near Vevay," Madame explained.

Elizabeth went into the *salon;* from its windows she could look into a couple of rooms in the front part of the chalet. She saw the young girl who had been walking in the gallery. She had her window open; the moon lighted her face — a pretty, girlish face. A window of the *salon* was open too. At some noise Elizabeth made, she looked up, and waved her hand gaily.

"Good evening," she said in English, with scarcely a trace of foreign accent. "We are neighbours, you see; I have been expecting you all day. *Ciel,* how could you bear to come to this awful place? Mamma will be in bed in a few minutes; then I am going down to the lake; don't you want to come? Your papa is in his room with a headache, Madame Bocher told me. She tells more in less time than anybody that ever lived, except me. But I've not heard your voice yet; to be sure, I've given you no chance! Don't speak; meet

me under the great willow. I want to hear your voice suddenly; then I shall know if we are to be friends or enemies—do one another good or harm."

She was gone, and Elizabeth stood quite confused by this sudden and rapid outburst of talk, delivered half in English, half in French. But it did not weary her as Madame Bocher's monologue had done. There was something bright and piquant, more in the way the words were spoken than in any merit they themselves possessed, which caused Elizabeth hastily to decide that the stranger would prove a pleasant companion.

She went dutifully up-stairs to inquire after her father, but neuralgia and memory had been too much for him. He could only kiss her drowsily, grumble a little about Gervais, and turn his head on his pillow. So there was nothing to prevent Elizabeth's accepting the French girl's tryst by the lake. Margot met her in the hall, and insisted on wrapping a shawl about her. Elizabeth submitted, because that was the quickest way to get her liberty. As she passed the great tree which spread its branches out over the lake, and sighed softly to the whispers of the waves, she caught sight of a white-cloaked figure on the bench by the

poplar beyond. She remembered the French girl's odd words. Like most young people, Elizabeth was fond now and then of yielding to superstitious follies.

"Here I am—is it for good or evil?" she called suddenly.

The girl sprang to her feet with a sharp cry —started back as if with some wild intention of running away—then moved forward a few steps, looked full in Elizabeth's face, cried out again, tried to laugh, and ended, to Elizabeth's great discomfiture, by bursting into a flood of hysterical weeping.

"I frightened you; I beg your pardon! I oughtn't to have come up so quietly," she said in French.

"No, no, it is not that; it is not that! I was waiting for you; but it is for no good! I shall do you mischief; I know I shall do you mischief."

Elizabeth began to laugh.

"We will not allow the old Breton superstition so much weight," said she. "I dare say you are tired to-night."

"Yes, mamma was so wearisome, and Monsieur La Tour was worse," returned the other, beginning to laugh also. "What a goose I am! You see it rained yesterday, and I could

not get out; and to-day mamma was suffering, and needed me, or thought she did!"

"Stopping in the house has made you nervous and excitable," added Elizabeth, kindly.

"Yes, that is it," returned the other; but she still gazed earnestly at her new acquaintance, and shivered as if the air had grown chill. "Why, there is nobody to introduce us," she continued merrily. "Well, I am Nathalie L'Estrange."

"And I am Elizabeth Crauford."

"Yes, I know; Madame has told me; your papa was here long ago." She laughed again. "I beg your pardon, but it seems so droll! Now, I am sure that twenty years hence I shall not go hunting up the places where Monsieur La Tour and I spend our honeymoon. I am to marry Monsieur La Tour; of course Madame has told you?"

"Oh, yes," said Elizabeth, not knowing quite what to say, and wondering if she ought to add some sort of good wish or other polite nothing.

"Very soon, too," continued Nathalie, "and he wears a wig! *Mon Dieu!* in the convent I always said I would die before I would do that; but, after all, it is not worth while to die for such a trifle—now is it?"

Elizabeth agreed that it was not; all the same, the idea of the wig made her shudder.

"I am just nineteen," said Nathalie. "How old are you?"

"About twenty."

"You are an American. So was my papa, for all he had a French name; but I never saw him. You must not speak of him to mamma. I have lived all my life in a convent. I only came out to be married. Are you going to marry?"

"I don't know what may happen to me in the future," replied Elizabeth, smiling at the other's childishness; "but I entertain no such intentions at present."

"They say American girls choose their own husbands," pursued Nathalie. "Well, I am sure I would not have chosen Monsieur La Tour. But I dare say he will do tolerably well; and I have no *dot*, so mamma thinks I am very fortunate. The *corbeille* will come next week; she says there will be lovely things in it. But how have you lived and where?"

"We were in Europe a good while when I was little. I was born here," Elizabeth said. "At last we went back to America and lived in the country. When papa and I were left alone, he grew weary of that and we crossed

the ocean again. This time we have been here four years—sometimes in England, but mostly in Italy."

"And I only know that horrid convent," sighed Nathalie. "Mamma sent me there when I was a tiny thing. It 's in Paris—the Rue Picpus—where the grave of La Fayette is, in the cemetery back, down beyond the alley of lindens."

"Oh, I know it," rejoined Miss Crauford. "Such a still, pretty place!"

"A horrible place," said Nathalie; "what the English girls call a beast of a place. But I used to rave over La Fayette, because I was half American, and put on great airs."

"I remember the beautiful linden-tree alley so well, and the bee-hives, and the old lame gardener, and the sisters in their white dresses—"

But Nathalie cut Miss Crauford's reminiscences short.

"You make me shudder! I see it all again, and old Sister Ursule, who used to tyrannize over us. Bless me, anything is better than that—even to marry Monsieur La Tour."

Love and marriage were sacred subjects to Elizabeth—inseparable too—vague, visionary subjects, which looked very far off, very beau-

tiful, very solemn. It hurt her somehow to hear her companion speak like that. Yet she had lived in the world enough to know that such talk and ideas, as Nathalie evidently cherished were not uncommon among her sex.

The French girl had turned abruptly away. She sprang on the low wall that bordered the lawn like a parapet, and walked up and down in silence, while Elizabeth sat and watched her. A slight, frail creature, almost giving the idea of delicate health, but the form so wonderfully pliant that it appeared more slender than it really was; lovely violet eyes, quantities of golden hair, and a mouth whose smiles were at once childlike and coquettish—sometimes fairly cruel.

Of course all these details were not visible to Miss Crauford in the uncertain light, but the description may as well be set down here.

She seemed a creature whose nature was not yet half awake, which perhaps lacked force ever to develope into real strength, though so capricious that she would appear to have half-a-dozen natures as the years went on. A girl who, with a stronger organization, mental and physical, might have grown into something dangerous as a tigress and cruel as death, sparing neither herself nor others in her reckless course.

But the feline instincts would probably never get beyond the kitten-stage. She might do mischief enough, but it would be from caprice and vanity, not hardened wickedness.

She darted off the wall as suddenly as she had mounted it, and came back to Miss Crauford.

"I shall love you very much," said she. "Haven't you a pet name—a nickname, as you say in English?"

"Papa calls me Queenie," replied Elizabeth, smiling as one would at the forwardness of a spoiled child.

"How delightful! I shall call you so too—may I, Queenie?"

"Oh, yes, if you like."

"*Reine!* That is better yet. You look like a real queen—so stately and—. O, dear, do you believe you are prettier than I?"

"No," said Elizabeth honestly. She greatly undervalued her own pale, grand beauty, and thought Nathalie's *piquant* face a thousand times more attractive.

"Well, I am glad of it. I might have hated you if you had been!"

"Just for that?"

"Of course! Why, there are only two things to make one woman hate another—if she's more beautiful or a man comes between."

Miss Crauford looked contemptuous.

"Both odd reasons," said she.

"Oh, you evidently know nothing about life, though you have lived in the world," returned Nathalie sagely. "But ah, my presentiment; I had forgotten that!"

"Then let it go," laughed Elizabeth.

"So I will! At all events, it is not now I shall hurt you, and we can keep out of each other's way hereafter. *Ay de mi!* (What a lovely Spanish girl we had in the convent!) It's an odd world, anyhow. Hark, there's old Susanne calling me. She will wake mamma if I don't go in, and then I shall get a dreadful lecture. Good night, Queenie — good night, *ma reine.*"

Away she ran, and Elizabeth followed in her sober, dignified fashion. So their first meeting ended; but, unimportant as it seemed, the time was to come when Elizabeth Crauford would look back across the lapse of years and shudder to remember Nathalie's childish mirth and frightened warning.

CHAPTER II.

A CALIFORNIA COURT-ROOM.

THERE is a certain excitement apparent in Moysterville this morning. The town always possesses life and animation enough, but it shows something more now.

A crowd fills the street leading to the Court House; groups at shop-doors discourse eagerly; a subdued, fiery indignation is apparent on all faces, causing one to think of days gone by when Moysterville bore a less pretentious name and presented a very different aspect. Those were days when it boded ill for any offender whose crimes or misdemeanours had roused that look of indignant determination, and brought a crowd toward Shippey's "liquoring place" on the confines of the village.

Shippey's place had for some reason been elevated to the dignity of serving as Court-room, and there stood in convenient proximity —just a little back toward the ravine—an old oak tree, a gnarled, knotted oak which had

suffered from wind and storm in its babyhood, and grown up with humps on its trunk, and its branches, mis-shapen, and many of them dead, stretched down like gigantic hands in search of prey. The old tree found prey enough at a period when even peaceable, God-fearing citizens were forced to admit that Judge Lynch's was the only law on which they could depend to save their homes and their town from ruin.

But those days are long gone. Shippey's is not; the oak is not; Lock-jaw Corner is not. Here is Moysterville now, broad-streeted, gas-lighted, boasting handsome shops, hotels, theatres, and a fashionable quarter. The town no more remembers the time when it bore the ugly appellation I have set down than a butterfly does its season of being a grub. A fine, flourishing place is Moysterville; a very old town (for California) and a rich one—small wonder when it stands within the shadow of the mountains whose hearts are gold, with a broad river to help its commerce, and railways which connect it with San Francisco and Sacramento.

But this morning, Moysterville, as I said, has a certain repressed indignation about it which reminds more than one of Lock-jaw Corner and Shippey's, and the old oak that used to be called

"Luck's End." The truth is, of late Moysterville has been very much annoyed by sundry attempts at garroting, not to mention outbreaks at the gambling-houses and rows in the streets. Now, Moysterville has put all these annoyances to the score of a party of "roughs" from San Francisco, though there has been no possibility of fastening the crimes upon them. But only a few nights since, a woman was arrested for stealing some valuable jewels from a man stopping at the hotel where she lodged. Moysterville believes that at her trial there will creep out disclosures which may serve to criminate the rest of the band, for it is a foregone conclusion in the mind of Moysterville that the woman was in league with the San Francisco desperadoes. It chanced that Court week began forty-eight hours after this woman's arrest, and now, on the third day since its opening, she is to have her trial.

So there is a throng in the street, and a dense crowd in the Court-room, waiting with what patience it may until several unimportant cases are disposed of, and Milady is brought into public consideration.

Everybody knows that name for her, and no other. During several seasons, there was a noted drinking-house in a bad quarter of San

Francisco which bore for sign "Milady's," and this woman ruled over the den and the gambling-tables up the tortuous back stairs, where the police so often stumbled. Milady disappeared from her familiar haunts one fine day, and nobody thought about her until it became known that she was the person accused of stealing the diamonds, and that she made her entry into Moysterville at the same time as the gamblers and the garroting attempts, and other disturbances of the public peace by which the town had been of late afflicted.

There is another cause of interest afforded by the coming trial which affects even the elegant portion of the community who dwell amid the grandeur of the Court end. The principal witness against Milady will be Darrell Vaughan, who has just come into possession of a large fortune by his uncle's death. Though Darrell Vaughan is not a resident of Moysterville, and was never here until a short time before his relative's decease, everybody knows about him, and the Court end has a natural interest in his affairs.

Moysterville considers it a most fortunate thing that old Mr. Vaughan died here, and that his nephew came to catch his last sigh and inherit his fortune, because it has been through

the young man's assistance that Milady was entrapped. Pious people call it a "providential circumstance," and even those who are not pious feel a sense of obligation towards Darrell Vaughan, since they hope that in the course of Milady's trial there may come out damning evidence against those men who have so lightly disregarded Moysterville's power.

The last trifling case ends; there is a sudden hush in the court. Even judge and jury look with undisguised interest towards the door, through which a brace of constables lead, or rather force, a veiled woman, who obstinately hangs back, and is not to be induced to take her proper position by any gentle means.

The preliminaries are gone through; the woman sits crouched on the bench where she was placed, huddled together in an odd fashion, which somehow suggests a wild animal about to spring. But she never stirs; does not even move her hands, which lie crossed in her lap—small white hands, too, though disfigured by sundry scratches and red marks, the result of the struggle wherein she indulged when the officers arrested her. She is ordered to put up her veil, but she pays no attention. A constable draws the lace off her head; she wears no bonnet. His quick movement brings away

the comb which confines her hair, and that falls in heavy dark masses down her back, unkempt and ill arranged, but beautiful hair still. Her face is visible now—a face which is young, though without a trace of youth in it, which must once have been marvellously lovely; not so many years ago either, for Milady is not over twenty-five. The complexion is fair yet; the mouth, sullen and hard as it is, possesses a certain feminine softness; the low, broad forehead is smooth and white. It is an utterly reckless, hopeless, apathetic face—a face that tells of degradation and sin and evil courses, of womanly instincts grown fiendish, and womanly gifts employed only as additional aids in an awful life.

She wears a rusty black silk gown, somewhat frayed and rent; an old shawl drawn over this; but the ladies from the Court end of town notice that the faded garment is of Indian cashmere—a relic, probably, of days when sin brought pleasanter wages than it has done of late. It is evident that she has made no effort to arrange her attire before coming into court. She looks tumbled, soiled—a mere wreck of what was once beauty and grace; yet there is an odd pathetic shadow of the old fascination left about her still.

Suddenly Milady raises her eyes; she has not before so much as stirred finger or eyelash, has not appeared even conscious where she was since the constables pushed her down upon the bench. But Milady looks up now. Her great brown eyes wander slowly about the Court-room; there is a dull film over them—a film through which they blaze with sombre fire. It is plain that she sees nothing in that long, slow gaze she bestows upon the throng—nothing whatever. They are like the eyes of a dead person, yet as if the dead person had been consumed to the last by a fever so horrible that the flame and heat are not burned out, though death has mastered all the rest.

Now, if possible, the attention of the crowd is more closely riveted upon her, for certain questions are being put by the grave servant of the law. Her name is asked. She does not seem to know that she is addressed. The lids have fallen over those heavy eyes. She sits as motionless as ever. An impatient constable near—for from first to last they have guarded the woman with unusual care—touches her shoulder, and, in a whisper, bids her speak.

"What is your name?"

The great eyes are lifted again so quickly

that their blaze startles the very judge in his chair, and the jury on their bench.

"Milady," says she, in a hoarse voice.

It is suggested to her that this is no name whatever. At the little preliminary examination, on the occasion of her arrest, she was hopelessly obstinate. There is nothing to be gained by this; it will be much wiser to answer civilly. Now she does indeed look hopelessly obstinate. The mouth shuts as if the delicate jaw was framed of iron; the whole face grows so much more hard, dull, and dogged, that the spectators wonder they could have thought it all those before.

The hope in the minds of judge, lawyers, and the rest, is that this woman may be induced to turn States' evidence against the men whom everybody believes her accomplices—men who are more than suspected of having been engaged in the great Sacramento robbery a few months previous. Hence, before the district attorney begins his statement of the case, this somewhat informal questioning has been attempted. Certain hints of what is desired of her are thrown out,—they cannot be new; she has heard such several times during the past days,—but she made no sign of comprehending then, and she makes none now.

"What is your age?" is the next question, tried in a mild tone, as if by way of holding a little amicable conversation.

Then comes a quick answer, in the form of an interrogatory though, and not at all what could have been expected; it is—

"How old is your sister?"

A subdued titter goes through the room. Judge, jury, and lawyers are furious. Constables would like to believe that a knot of men, suspected of belonging to the band of desperadoes, have been guilty of this infraction of order, but the men are stolid and serious.

There is one more question attempted—

"Will you tell your name and birthplace?"

Milady, roused into life, bends forward in her seat, clasps the railing in front of her so tightly that the muscles stand out on her lithe, dangerous-looking hands; her eyes blaze so fiercely for an instant that the film over them is quite dispelled.

"You go to hell!" she exclaims, with a ferocious candour, which under any circumstances would do much towards settling her case in advance with both judge and jury.

Nobody laughs now. There is something fairly mélo-dramatic and awful about the woman, in spite of the coarse speech. She lets

her hands fall from the railing; sinks slowly back in her seat; her body and limbs huddled together in that strange attitude so like a wild animal crouched ready to spring; and the lids droop again over the fiery eyes.

The prosecuting attorney begins his speech; he explains the charge; he goes on grandiloquently to state how he is prepared to prove, by competent witnesses, the woman's positive guilt. Yet even here he is mindful of that wish in all hearts to persuade the creature into revelations which shall bring to justice more dangerous criminals than herself. She listens for the first time; looks towards him in a perplexed, absorbed way; lifts her hand, and astounds all listeners by her sharp, hoarse voice.

"I wouldn't waste my breath, old fogey! Milady I am—game to the last. Now push on with your caravan."

The prosecuting attorney brings his speech to a hasty conclusion; Milady has made a climax which renders any efforts at eloquence on his part utterly futile.

The first witness comes forward. He is only a waiter at the hotel. His evidence is not important; though everybody listens attentively to what he has to say—everybody except

Milady,—she evidently has lost interest in the proceedings. Another witness, not much more exciting. Milady is still absent, dull, vacant, looking as if partially stupefied by the influence of some powerful drug.

Darrell Vaughan is called; straightway he emerges from a nook where he has been ensconced to avoid attention—a tall, handsome young man—and takes his place in the witness-box. Milady has not stirred at the utterance of his name; seems unconscious of his proximity. She does not look up while the oath is administered, but his voice answering the first question brings her out of her stupor.

Again she leans forward in her seat—the eyes of the accused and the witness meet and look full into each other. If it were not a folly, one might say that the calm, steady gaze of the witness holds a strange menace and warning. One might say that Milady feels it too, for she drops again into her former attitude, only her eyes never leave the witness's face; there is no fire left in them now, they are quite dead and cold.

I have no intention of carrying you through a chapter of such details as you might read in the columns of a police newspaper. The evidence against Milady was conclusive, and

I shall give it in a few words. Darrell Vaughan had gone in the dusk of evening to call upon Mr. Carstoe, an agent for the Moysterville property lately come into the young man's possession. Mr. Carstoe lived at a second-rate hotel; he was to set out the next morning for San Francisco with these diamonds, which he had taken in payment of a debt. There were two studs, a ring, and a quantity of unset stones—a rare and valuable emerald among them; the market value of the whole perhaps reaching thirteen thousand dollars. Their loss will be ruin to Mr. Carstoe. He went through a long, tedious suit to get them from a former partner in business, who had cheated him in their affairs, destroyed his prospects, and yet kept himself secure from the law for years.

Mr. Carstoe had taken the jewels out of the bank, intending to start by the next morning's early train. Vaughan was with him when he went on his errand.

The two stood on the outer steps of the house, and talked about the diamonds; Vaughan being of opinion that Mr. Carstoe would do better to send the gems to New York than to sell them in San Francisco. They had held a long and animated discussion, when they became aware that the woman called Milady was standing just

behind them in the hall. The bank was in an upper story; the lower floor held shops, offices, and, in a court at the back, an establishment where money was lent upon tangible securities.

The two gentlemen stepped aside to let the woman pass; they both saw her face distinctly. Whether she had just come up, or had remained listening to their conversation, neither knew, nor did either, it appeared, think about the matter at the time.

On the evening of this day, Vaughan went to the hotel where Mr. Carstoe lodged; he had asked that gentleman to carry a parcel for him to a friend in San Francisco. The waiter believed that Mr. Carstoe was in his room, so Vaughan walked on up the two flights of stairs which led to No. 45. No. 45 was a room down a narrow dark passage off the broad corridor traversing the house. A woman—it was Milady—came swiftly out of this passage, and passed Mr. Vaughan without seeing him, as he stood in the shadow, uncertain whether he had taken the right turning.

Mr. Carstoe was not in his chamber; the door was locked. Vaughan waited for a little in the corridor, thinking Mr. Carstoe might appear. At last he went down-stairs again, and confided his packet to the waiter, with instruc-

tions that it should be given to Mr. Carstoe. Vaughan went home. Before the evening was over, Mr. Carstoe came to tell him that the diamonds had been stolen. It had immediately occurred to him that he and Vaughan had been passed by Milady on the bank steps. The suspicion in his mind was of course rendered a certainty by Vaughan's having seen Milady come out of the passage which led to room No. 45.

The two went at once before a magistrate, and procured without difficulty a warrant for the woman's arrest. When they reached the hotel, in company with the officer, the waiter—the same to whom Vaughan had confided the packet—told them that Milady had not left the house. She was, indeed, found in her apartment in a deep, lethargic sleep, from which it was difficult to rouse her. Her dress was open, and fastening the band of her chemise was a diamond stud, which Mr. Carstoe recognized as his property. But no trace of the other jewels appeared. In the bottom of Milady's trunk was discovered a skeleton key done up in a package of rags. Probably this key was to have been thrown into the river, but oppressed by drink or opium, the woman had lain down to sleep first. The general theory was that a

confederate had taken the diamonds away at once, that from some freak of feminine vanity she had retained the button which completed the chain of evidence against her.

Like a mad woman Milady fought, and the faces of the officer and the waiter, called in to assist, were tattooed as curiously as those of South Sea islanders before she was secured. She refused to walk; she yelled like a wild beast in the street; in the end she had been tied hand and foot, thrown upon a dray, and conveyed to gaol.

Mr. Carstoe was not a vindictive man; many persons thought he showed great weakness in the matter, a culpable pity for the woman, but he could not avoid pursuing the case. Darrell Vaughan was firm, though very kind to Milady. He actually visited her cell, and promised, for Mr. Carstoe, that the proceedings should be dropped if she would disclose the names of her confederates.

Until Vaughan undertook this merciful errand, Milady had raged up and down her narrow quarters like a bedlamite, beating herself against the barred window and the iron door; but from that time till she appeared in the Court-room to undergo her trial, she remained perfectly quiet —apathetic even.

Mr. Vaughan made no discoveries; he represented Milady as never so much as speaking to or looking at him during the half-hour he stood pleading with her. But from that moment she became composed—sleeping a good deal, or if not sleeping, lying for hours on her truckle-bed with her eyes half shut. The jailor knew that she was under the influence of some drug, but though they searched her and the cell, nothing was found, nor did it seem that she wished to kill herself—probably it was an old habit to deaden her senses in this way.

There had been such firm belief that she could give information which would lead to the tracking of the Sacramento thieves, that many efforts were made during the days she lay in gaol before her trial. A clergyman went to see her; a noted female philanthropist paid her a visit; both interviews taking place after Darrell Vaughan's generous effort to save her—an effort which was considered at the Court end of town a feat more noble than that of any handsome Paladin of old. Neither clergyman nor philanthropist was more successful than Mr. Vaughan. During the clergyman's eloquent exhortation, Milady uttered but one remark—she repeated that with such sullen persistency, and it was in itself so absurd and

irrelevant, that the good man could only suppose her brain disordered by the drugs she had taken.

"Twice ten are twenty—he said so—twice ten are twenty."

The virgin philanthropist was quickly driven from the field in disgust. She had requested the keeper to stand at the door during her interview, in order that there might be a witness of her fervid eloquence. Milady sat crouched on a bench when the servant of Vesta and all good works entered; it was one of Milady's utterly dead hours. At length she interrupted the philanthropist by a question—a question which convinced that lady of the creature's utter depravity, and the uselessness of trying to aid her, though there was neither sneer nor mockery in Milady's voice; an odd tremulousness crossed her features, and her glazed eyes softened for the first and last time, as if they had tears under them.

"Have you got a baby?" she asked.

The philanthropist was convulsed with rage, the keeper outside nearly suffocated himself in an attempt to stifle his laughter, but Milady only stared straight before her with the same shadow of softening in her stony face.

The daughter of Duty was gone; the

keeper locked the cell and followed her. As he closed the grating, he saw Milady look wildly about, raise her arms high above her head, and fall or throw herself heavily upon the floor; but he had no time to waste over her performances. Let her bang about and bruise her body if she liked, she could do herself no real harm.

So the trial has come on and ended. The jury has no need to leave the box. The verdict requires brief deliberation—guilty of course. Yet when it does come, few people can be quite unmoved; many ladies shiver and weep, and Darrell Vaughan looks pale and worn, and leans his head wearily on his hand. But Milady is utterly untouched; she does not appear to have heard; her head is bent, and under the shadow of her forehead those dull eyes always watch Darrell Vaughan. His glance never left her while giving his evidence; it has held her firmly ever since he finished and seated himself almost in front of her.

Then the judge's hard little speech and the judge's sentence. Milady is to have ten years in the penitentiary!

She hears that — she rises—she is looking still at Darrell Vaughan, not at the judge—her voice is audible.

"Ten years. O my God! ten years!"

If it were not a folly, one might say that Vaughan's firm lips frame the words also, "Ten years—ten years," while his eyes never move from hers.

A stir, a rustle among the audience, promptly repressed by the constables. Hush, the judge is speaking again. Ten years in the penitentiary for Milady! At the end of that time there will follow a new case, if in the meanwhile Milady has not come to her senses enough to give the evidence which they are morally certain she possesses in regard to the Sacramento robbery. A new case which the judge promises her shall add yet ten more years to her term of imprisonment. He does not explain, but most people have heard something of this other business during the last few days. Stories have spread that Milady had attempted to steal documents and bonds from old Mr. Vaughan's house just after his death. So, altogether, this affair of Milady's creates great excitement, because it is felt and believed that she is only an instrument in the hands of those abandoned men whom she so obstinately refuses to betray.

"Ten years, and again ten; you will no

more escape the iron hand of Justice then than you have done now."

She hears the judge's words—she is on her feet—her apathy or stupor quite gone. She writhes to and fro—her hands work up and down. Only that it is a foolish thought, one might say she is like a person partially magnetized, trying to break the spell as she turns and twists and strives to move her eyes from Vaughan's. Then at last her voice rings out, sharp and discordant. She has half flung herself over the railing. Her eyes, mad with newly awakened agony, seek judge and jury.

"O my God! gentlemen, ten years! I can't go to prison for ten years," cries the suddenly distracted creature. "I can't go—what will become of the child?"

Let us hope there are hearts to which that cry strikes home; lost, fallen as she is, let us hope it! Let us believe that even the judge has a struggle to say so sternly—

"You should have thought of that before."

"Ten years! O my God! I can't! Ten years! Oh! the child!"

Milady has dropped on her knees now, still clinging to the railing. Her dilated eyes have wandered from judge and jury,—wandered back to Vaughan's face. Perhaps she does not see him;

perhaps she is only blindly gazing about for some trace of pity, some hopeless hope of help.

"Ten years! O my God! gentlemen, I can't! Oh! the child, the child!"

There are tears now from women and men too. No change could have been more sudden or more unexpected to the spectators themselves than this which has come over them.

Milady is still on her knees, swaying to and fro, smiting her breast with her hands, her great, tearless eyes uplifted, and again her voice rings out in that frantic wail,—

"Ten years! O my God! I can't! Oh! the child, the child!"

The constables approach; she pushes them off; she fights like a maddened animal; her long hair floats out like a torn bright banner in her struggles. Women cover their faces. Strong men turn away unnerved. Always Darrell Vaughan leans back in his seat, pale, weary, watching still.

"Ten years! O my God! the child!"

Still that agonized cry—a horrible moan now. The officers have seized her, bound her hands. She is lifted from the dock and carried away; but to the last that cry rings back,—a low groan only, but piercing as a shriek,—

"Ten years! O my God! the child!"

The court adjourns, and the crowd spring up eager to get out. They had come for a sensation, but this closing scene has been more than they bargained for. Milady goes back to gaol as a temporary residence before repairing to her quarters in the penitentiary. People go off to their employments, to drinking-places, and those from the Court end return home to dinner, for the September day is drawing to a close when the throng gets into the street.

Great piles of gorgeous red and yellow clouds have gathered in the west and cast a lurid light over the mountain tops, which rise frowningly above the town, strike the river with their fiery tints, and turn it into a sea of flame.

The Court-house and the gaol stand near the water, an open space in front. As Milady is hurried from one to the other, she too catches sight of the bright sunset. If the constables were weak, imaginative men, they might wonder what thoughts are roused in her mind by the sudden glory which she may perhaps not see again for years. But the constables are staid, sensible fellows, bent on their duty—that of getting Milady as speedily as possible into her cell before her demons again attack her; and Milady only gives one groan, half of misery, half of sullen defiance, and allows herself to be led on.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THE TRIAL.

THE comfortable carriage in which old Mr. Vaughan, deceased, used to take his airings during the months he had for some years annually spent at Moysterville, drives up to the Court-house. Young Mr. Vaughan comes out surrounded by a group of the principal personages of the town, who delight to do him honour. There are the mayor and the judge, and several lawyers and merchants with marriageable daughters, and they are all exceedingly friendly with young Mr. Vaughan. But he looks tired and pale still, and gets away as soon as he can, though he has something pleasant and fitting to say to each of the prosperous gentlemen, and he says it with a grace and cordiality which are fascinating indeed.

Then he takes the arm of Mr. Carstoe, who has stood modestly aside, as befits his humbler station, and walks on towards his carriage.

But Mr. Carstoe receives greetings, too, from the great men, somewhat patronizing, no doubt; but, in his way, Mr. Carstoe is a person who deserves and gains respect.

"You will come and dine with me," Darrell Vaughan observes, as the sleek, fat horses trot off in a decorous fashion. "What a set of tiresome idiots those fellows are! Now that is a dangerous freedom of speech, Carstoe, but you are a safe man; one can say what one likes to you."

Mr. Carstoe smiles grimly, yet it is evident he appreciates the compliment; that the smile looks grim is the fault of his features, not his will. He is thin, weedy, anxious looking, with a stoop in his back and a melancholy crack in his voice, but the face possesses energy, and truthfulness into the bargain. The world has not dealt kindly with Mr. Carstoe. He came to California long years before, when other men coined gold whichever way they turned, but somehow misfortune always stood between him and the wealth he was just ready to touch. Since his partner ruined him he has subsided into a small lawyer and agent for other people's property, and is a man to be trusted, else he would never have been admitted, as all Moysterville knows he was, to the confidence

of the late Mr. Vaughan, as suspicious and restless a gentleman as could easily be found even among those unfortunates of the earth—old men with goodly fortunes which they must soon forsake.

The carriage crosses the bridge, rolls down the principal street, gay with shops and showy hotels, and makes its way up the hill toward the quarter of the town where fashion dwells. Very elegant houses there are here, filled with gorgeous furniture and Parisian luxuries; and dinners and balls are given in them, and life is so dull and stereotyped that one wonders these dwellers in a new land are content to accept it.

On the outskirts of this little star of avenues and streets stands the commodious villa erected by Mr. Vaughan several years since, when the physicians recommended the climate of California as likely to invigorate his failing health. A fine place, with a broad lawn and grand old trees spared in the destruction of the noble grove which once towered here. Within, there is comfort and elegance, for in his quiet fashion Mr. Vaughan had liked to enjoy the wealth heaped up by his own exertions.

The carriage stops before the entrance; the last rays of the setting sun touch Darrell's forehead as he descends, and with his usual

courtesy offers an arm to his elderly companion.

"It has grown chilly," Darrell says, and shivers.

As he speaks, at the other end of the city the door of a prison cell has shut; a turnkey has brought Milady her supper, and locked her in alone for the night—alone with her ghosts and her remorse, if she is haunted by such—alone with the miserable plaint which still at intervals breaks from her white lips—the wail whose fierce agony startled judge and jury, witnesses and court, not long since in the Court-room,—"My child! O God! my child!"

The great doors of the villa have closed upon Vaughan and his guest. The host leads the way to the library, where the gas-lamps are already lighted, and a log of odorous Californian wood blazes on the hearth. It is too early in the season for the nights to be very cool, but old Mr. Vaughan liked a fire at most times, and the housekeeper has ordered it to be lighted from habit.

"We shall have dinner in twenty minutes, they say," observed Darrell. "Let 's try a little sherry while we are waiting."

The wine is brought. Mr. Carstoe contents himself with a few sips, but Darrell drains two

glasses of the bright golden cordial in rapid succession—drinks another as hastily when Mr. Carstoe stands by the fire with his back towards him.

Mr. Carstoe's meditations are naturally not of the brightest. This recent loss is scarcely calculated to raise his spirits. But life has been too hard for him to be greatly astonished or cast down by any new trouble.

"It is just what I might have expected would happen," he has said to Vaughan more than once during the past days. "That money—for the diamonds were as good as money—would have started me afresh in the world. I meant to buy up those loose lands about Mumford's Hollow, and in two years I should have been a rich man."

Probably he is going over a train of similar thought now, perhaps contrasting his companion's position with his own, as he knocks the toe of his boot against the low fender, glances about the handsomely appointed room, and says moodily,—

"And there are people who don't believe in luck: why, if you're not born with it, life is about as easy as climbing up a wall without any chinks between the stones."

Vaughan laughs at the odd comparison,

but it is neither a hard nor unsympathizing laugh.

"It is never too late for luck to turn," he replies, coming up to the fire. "You're a good fellow, Carstoe, and I've taken an immense fancy to you. I know my uncle liked you."

"Well, I never knew anybody's liking to do me any great amount of good," observes Mr. Carstoe, candidly. "Still, I own I am glad to have it, and I can say for your late uncle that though he was a difficult man, he paid well, and did justice to one's attempts to do one's work."

"And as far as that last goes, you shall find his nephew resembles him," says Darrell, holding out his hand. "I've not said much—words are poor things—but I'm deucedly cut up about your misfortune, and—. Ah, here's Tony to announce dinner; well, we'll feed first and talk it over afterwards."

They dine exceedingly well, and Vaughan presses many varieties of generous wines upon his guest. By the time the meal is over and they sit alone near the fire again, with their cigars lighted, Mr. Carstoe is much more cheerful and talkative than usual. He has reasons beyond the effects of claret and champagne for this change. Darrell Vaughan has offered him

the agency of all the Californian property, from the unopened mining tracts, to the lands in several growing towns — offered not only a generous salary, but per-centages so large that a new career, the certainty of a moderate fortune, presents itself suddenly to the eyes of the world-buffeted man. They talk a great deal about the business; they talk of the late uncle whose memory Mr. Carstoe holds in affectionate reverence. They speak, too, of another matter connected with the will, and of the person whom it affects. This is Launcelot Cromlin, Darrell's cousin. When a boy he had been a favourite with his uncle. Five years previous, a youth of one-and-twenty at the time, Launce Cromlin fell under the suspicion of a terrible deed. Mr. Vaughan had been spending the summer in Vermont on account of his health. His two nephews had visited him there in turn. Early in the autumn Launce was going to Europe to pursue his art studies. When the young man's birth-day arrived, Mr. Vaughan sent him a cheque for fifteen hundred dollars. It was months before the old gentleman saw this cheque again; when it came back, the amount had been altered to fifteen thousand dollars, and on the back was an indorsement signed by Cromlin, making the cheque payable to the bearer.

Launce was in Europe. Mr. Vaughan made inquiries of the bank-teller, but not in a way to excite suspicion. The teller was positive that Mr. Cromlin had presented the draft in person. He recollected Cromlin saying he had been out of town and expected to send the paper by a friend to be cashed, but had himself returned.

Mr. Vaughan was a secretive, proud man; terribly suspicious too, for he had suffered much from the treachery of several persons whom he had best loved. He kept the discovery from everybody but Darrell, whom he liked, though this nephew had never been so dear to him as Launce. Apparently Launce had hoped the indorsement would persuade his uncle that the cheque had passed through other hands, thus relieving him from suspicion.

In his brief letter to Cromlin, Mr. Vaughan did not even state the reasons which led him to disown and fairly curse the youth he had loved so tenderly. Epistles came from Launce; they were returned unopened. Darrell naturally paid no attention to the appeals which his cousin addressed to him, begging to be told what had caused this change in his uncle.

Partly on account of his health, partly because familiar haunts had grown hateful in his grief

and increased misanthropy, Mr. Vaughan went to California, where he owned an extensive property. He divided his time between San Francisco and Moysterville, only once revisiting the Atlantic States, about a year before his death.

Some two weeks previous to Mr. Vaughan's decease, a lawyer-friend in New York to whom, during that last visit, the old man had communicated the secret, sent him a statement of facts which though they did not clear up the mystery, were proofs to Mr. Vaughan that Cromlin had been the victim of fraud and treachery. For weeks before and after the presentation of the cheque, Launce had lain in bed helpless from a fracture of the right arm. Besides this, it had been recently discovered that a systematic series of thefts had long been carried on by the teller and cashier of the bank. Both men were since fugitives from justice, and it was probable that the teller, at least, had had a share in the crime until now ascribed to Cromlin.

Launce had never returned to America. He had lived upon the limited income inherited from his father and pursued his art studies. After those first efforts at reconciliation, the haughty family spirit had risen, and he attempted nothing further. He and Darrell

had met once in Europe, but Darrell gave him no clue to the cause of their uncle's conduct, though he promised to tell their relative how honourable and straightforward Launce's life was, and do his best to end the estrangement.

When the news came which convinced Mr. Vaughan he had wronged his nephew, he wrote to his lawyer-friend in New York enclosing a letter to be forwarded to Launce. There must be some means of discovering the young man's European address, and he begged piteously that his friend would act with the utmost despatch; he wanted to see his boy again. But all the lawyer could discover was the name of a London House to whom letters were forwarded by Launce's bankers in New York. So Mr. Sandford sent the epistle to them, and wrote to Mr. Vaughan that he had done so, proposing to despatch an agent to Europe in search of Cromlin, but when his response reached California Mr. Vaughan was dead.

After the old gentleman became convinced of Launce's innocence, he told the whole story to Mr. Carstoe, bitterly lamenting the injury he had done his boy. Mr. Carstoe was aware that the fortune had been left to Darrell, with the exception of a small bequest (provisional in a certain way), which even in his wrath he could

not forbear allotting his former favourite. But from his conversation, Carstoe supposed that on the receipt of this news he had changed his will and divided his wealth equally between his nephews. He knew that on the very day the tidings came, Mr. Vaughan was closeted for hours with his lawyer, John Smith. The next day but one, Mr. Smith was sent for again, and this time it was to add a codicil to the will, and that codicil Vaughan read to Mr. Carstoe after he and the housekeeper had witnessed it, and the lawyer was gone. It was an odd, romantic codicil enough, but in keeping with Mr. Vaughan's peculiar character and theories; and, indeed, that night, talking to Carstoe more freely than he had ever before done, he told him enough of his own past to account for the whim.

After Mr. Vaughan's death, to the law-agent's astonishment, the original will was found, with the codicil attached. Mr. Carstoe was utterly confounded. The only solution to the mystery seemed that Edgar Vaughan had composed the codicil when his feelings changed toward Cromlin, but that he had put off, as men so often do, the alteration in his testament until too late. Darrell inherited the fortune with the exception of ten thousand dollars bequeathed to Launce.

Darrell was to pay the whole amount to his cousin if he found the young man behaving well; if not, he was to retain the principal and pay an annual interest counted at ten per cent. But even this interest was to be withheld for five years if Darrell became convinced that Cromlin would only squander it in dissipation. So to-night the conversation between the two men gets round to Launce Cromlin and the strange stipulation in the codicil concerning a certain portion of the property.

"Your cousin is an artist, I think," Mr. Carstoe says.

"He dreams of being one," replies Darrell, with a shrug; "whether he will ever do more than dream is doubtful. I saw him about two years since in Europe—an agreeable fellow—clever too, but I am afraid not a man to trust."

"Indeed! And did you talk over that affair? It seems so odd, since he was innocent, that he never tried to clear himself."

"I knew nothing about the matter then; my uncle never told me a word till he chose to think he had proofs that Launce was not guilty."

Mr. Carstoe wonders how he could have been so mistaken; he thought Mr. Vaughan had told him that Darrell knew all from the first.

"Well," he says, "when the poor fellow gets our letters he will be glad to know that the affair was cleared up before his uncle's death."

"Glad to know that my uncle was convinced," amends Darrell; "real proofs of Launce's innocence he never had."

"But you have no doubt?"

"I can't tell; I want to like Launce; I mean I want to believe in him—like him I do. Now about the will itself. You believe that my uncle meant to make another?"

"Yes, as I told you," Mr. Carstoe replies, firmly.

"I shall act," says Darrell, "as I think my uncle would like to have me. To divide the fortune equally would not be fair, for the foundation of a good deal of it was laid by my father."

This is news also to Mr. Carstoe, but he cannot doubt the fact.

"You will behave rightly, I am sure," he answers.

"The ten thousand dollars he will have at once," pursues Darrell. "If I find him steady, hard-working, trying to atone for past errors, I will make that sum a hundred thousand. More than that I *know* my uncle would not have done."

Mr. Carstoe feels, and says truly, that under the circumstances few men would do so much. The declaration might sound less generous if he were acquainted with Launcelot Cromlin; he would then be aware that there is not a possibility of Launce's listening to such an offer.

"He has still another opportunity," continues Darrell with a smile. "If he succeeds in winning Miss Elizabeth Crauford's hand, he will inherit the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars of Eastern bonds and stocks that the codicil awards to whichever of us two may gain her favour."

"It was a romantic sort of thing for a business man to hatch," Carstoe replies; "but Mr. Vaughan was very odd. He had once cared for the young lady's mother. He talked freely with me during that last fortnight, though I had always thought him a very secretive, silent man; but you often notice these changes toward the end. He read me the codicil after Smith had gone, and talked a great deal about Launce Cromlin—about his own past too."

"Yes," from Darrell.

Mr. Carstoe had given every one of these details weeks ago, on the night of Darrell's arrival, while Mr. Vaughan was still alive,

but Darrell has a certain pleasure in hearing them again.

"How odd that he should have outlived Smith, after all. He was so frail and miserable, and Smith looked such a tower of strength. I remember Mr. Vaughan's saying to him in his caustic way, 'You look so disgustingly well and strong, Smith, it's fairly insulting.'"

Mr. Carstoe rubs his hands together, and shakes his head.

"And poor Smith was killed the very day of my uncle's paralytic stroke," says Darrell.

"The very day! Thrown from his horse, and picked up with his neck broken," returns Mr. Carstoe, opening his hands wide and bringing them together again with energy. "It is odd how we go, very odd."

"Yes," once more—an assent this time.

"I had gone away two days before on business," pursues Mr. Carstoe, in a low voice. "When I got back, Smith was dead and your poor uncle little better." He sits silent for a while, then speaks again, to get rid of this mournful train of thought. "You will see your cousin in New York?"

"If he is there I shall."

"Oh, he 'll come as soon as our letters reach him. I lost no time, as you directed, in writing

about the legacy and the codicil. If he is in Europe, those bankers whose address you gave me will forward the letters at once."

"Naturally," replies Darrell.

"And about your own chance. You don't mean to let your cousin take it by default?" asks Mr. Carstoe slyly.

"I shall never sell myself for money," returns Vaughan, quietly. "I never saw Miss Crauford. I should be certain to dislike her. Let master Launce win her and the fortune, if he can."

"If neither succeed, the whole goes to a charity," pursues Mr. Carstoe; "to a charity," moving his finger slowly, as if reading the conditions of the codicil in the embers.

"Better, perhaps, for the young lady and Launce Cromlin too."

"Then you put yourself quite out of the question?"

"I don't like that mixing up of romance and business. I told you I should be sure to hate her," replies Vaughan.

Tony brings in coffee and curaçoa and kirschwasser. Darrell makes his guest taste both liquids. He always likes to feel his power, no matter how trifling the thing in which it is shown. He has pleasure in forcing his abstemious companion slightly to muddle him-

self; he enjoys seeing that the steadiest person has his weaknesses. Mr. Carstoe is a wonderfully temperate man for California, but a little excess is excusable to-night. Since the loss of the diamonds he has thought himself on the verge of ruin, until Vaughan's generous proposals at dinner cleared the way to comfort and a competency. It is not surprising that he should be pleased and excited enough to forget somewhat his customary prudence, under his host's persuasions. He is by no means intoxicated; his brain is quickened, his thoughts come rapidly, he feels in a talkative mood, and very happy—that is all. He has not forgotten the business either; he begins discussing what wonders can be done with the mining tract and the "town lots" in the new villages, but Vaughan does not want to talk business.

"Time enough while we are going down to San Francisco to arrange these affairs," he says. "Besides, I shall stay there for a few days."

"I shall come back as soon as I have attended to your matters there," Mr. Carstoe replies. "But one thing—about this house—what do you mean to do with it?"

"Sell it when there is a chance; in the meantime you can look about for a good tenant or purchaser."

"Then you 'll not live in California?"

"I!" He utters the monosyllable in a tone of disdainful surprise, but changes his voice as he adds, "No; I may go abroad for a time, but New York is my home."

"And you have already made a start in politics; think of having been a Congressman at your age!" exclaims Mr. Carstoe, in an admiring tone. He looks at the handsome, elegant fellow who, still under thirty, has wealth and honours in his grasp, and wonders why human destinies differ so. He remembers when he too was young, and had hopes and aspirations; but they have been dead so many years now that even their ghosts have almost ceased to haunt him.

Darrell Vaughan is one of those men who could drink a whole dinner-party under the table without showing signs of being affected by his potations. To-night he has an unusual craving for stimulants,—a desire for companionship too. He keeps Mr. Carstoe until very late. He orders materials for hot punch, and will not spare his guest. Such murderous hospitality is too common in California for Mr. Carstoe to be surprised, but he cannot resist Vaughan's entreaties as he is in the habit of doing those of other men. This young fellow

has a rare gift of fascination about him, to which Mr. Carstoe yields as readily as do most people. Brief as their acquaintance is, Vaughan has assumed a complete ascendancy over him; yet the lawyer is not an impressionable person.

Darrell talks in his turn, brilliantly, dashingly, in terse, quick periods, which show talent, careful thought and study too, easily and naturally as he converses. He enjoys drawing out his visitor. Mr. Carstoe is no ordinary business-hack; there are all sorts of odd corners and quaint ideas in that mind long accustomed to the depressing influence of business drudgery. Vaughan brings these forth successfully; he hears about the old hopes and struggles; old loves and disappointments too; and is interested, even while he feels a certain contempt for this man who had the making of so much in his composition, and yet has never succeeded in raising his life beyond a dull, commonplace failure. Of politics, of professions they talk; of women too; for Vaughan, who must always study somebody, is curious to know what creeds or ideas are in the man's brain. But this last discussion brings to Mr. Carstoe's mind the events of the day—events from which Darrell has hitherto kept the conversation aloof.

Mr. Carstoe shudders. He knows that it was

right the woman should suffer the consequences of her guilt, be shut up beyond the possibility of continuing her evil career; but to be forced to bring the charge, to follow up the process, has been the hardest task he ever undertook. Lost, abandoned as the woman is, he has pitied her from the first. Nothing but necessity, the sense that it is right and just, has carried him through.

"I hope such a thing will never happen to me again," he says suddenly. "But I could not act otherwise—I could not."

"You are somewhat excited still," Vaughan replies coldly. "You could not condone crime; we have gone over all that often enough."

"Yes," sighs Mr. Carstoe. Then a pause, after which he adds,—"There is some mystery under it all that we shall never understand. Mrs. Simpson says she did come twice to see your uncle—was with him when he had the fit."

Vaughan is lighting a fresh cigar; when he has succeeded, he puffs out a graceful column of smoke, and says quietly,—

"No doubt there was an intention to make some great haul like that at Sacramento. People here had better take care. Milady was probably only an instrument in the hands of those

men. It might not have been legal, but they 'd much better have kept her from trial on condition that she exposed the whole."

"It was your telling the judge of catching her about the house after your uncle's death which got her so long a punishment."

"Perhaps; it was my duty though," replies Darrell. "Ten years! Ten years is a long time, Carstoe!"

Mr. Carstoe assents in a troubled way to this self-evident proposition.

"Especially when one must pass them in prison," adds Vaughan.

Again Mr. Carstoe shivers as he answers. He could almost think there is a harsh, triumphant ring in the young man's voice; but when he looks up, Darrell is leaning his head on his hand and gazing wearily into the fire. From first to last he has been very kind, and shown a humane interest in the poor wretch. Mr. Carstoe feels a pang of self-reproach that he can for an instant have fancied there is anything hard or cruel about his engaging companion.

Vaughan drinks more punch, and Mr. Carstoe with difficulty escapes imbibing another glass, which he feels would upset him entirely. He looks at his watch, pleads the lateness of the

hour, and suggests the propriety of a sober business-man getting home and to bed without delay.

"Nonsense," says Vaughan, "you can't go back to-night. I'd have the trap out, only the servants would hate me for ever. You must stop here. I told Mrs. Simpson to get a bed ready."

Mr. Carstoe is quite overcome by this last touch of friendly attention. He feels that Darrell Vaughan is a man to work for, stand by, die for if need be! Punch and gratitude render Mr. Carstoe fairly heroic in his sentiments.

"They 've given you the room next mine," pursues the host, finishing his glass. "This house is a gloomy old barrack at the best. I 'm glad of society."

He moves impatiently, and stirs the embers into a flame. It occurs to Mr. Carstoe that in spite of his energy and vitality, this young Vaughan is a very nervous man—any great strain now or sharp illness would tell terribly on him. Darrell begins laughing and jesting again, and the guest forgets his thought. He has not seen his companion so gay before; Vaughan has been greatly affected by his uncle's death, and during the first days did nothing but lament his own dilatoriness in not coming be-

fore. Those self-reproaches have placed him on a high pinnacle in the minds of the dignitaries of Moysterville. They do not believe them deserved; but have given him great credit therefor. Old Mr. Vaughan was a reticent, moody man who liked to be alone; even the nephew whom he loved could not intrude upon him unasked. Darrell has made this known too; but he has reproached himself all the same, and Moysterville admires him, and will long talk of his behaviour—so fitting, "so sweetly melancholy," the ladies at the Court end pronounce it, and other people say the same.

Vaughan himself shows his visitor upstairs; bids him not take pains to be quiet, because he likes to know there is some living thing near besides the rats, and is amusing and agreeable to the last. He is in his own room at length; but, instead of going to bed, he throws himself on a sofa, and lies staring at the shaded light. His lips move occasionally, and if there is any spirit listener bending over him unseen, these are the words that ghostly visitant must catch—"Ten years—ten years."

Sometimes there is the hard ring of triumph, which for an instant surprised Mr. Carstoe in his voice; sometimes a weariness and unrest, but he says the words over and over.

Then he rises; goes to a dressing-case, unlocks it, and takes out a tiny box—a box that holds a quantity of greenish pills. He swallows three of these, and, since sleep will not come, sits down at his writing-table while waiting for the hasheesh to do its work of bringing up a pleasant vision.

He turns over certain papers, among them a letter from his uncle to Robert Crauford—a letter in which are detailed the conditions of that odd codicil. Whichever of his nephews wins the hand of his old friend's daughter will claim the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars exempted from the rest of his fortune.

The letter to apprise Launce Cromlin of this bequest is on its way to New York, but as Launce is terribly careless in the matter of addresses, it is likely to lie a long time unclaimed.

Vaughan still sits at the table, but the potion has begun its work. The walls expand; the room stretches into space. Bright tints and colours float about; his physical frame seems to lose its density, and to drift up, up toward the radiant gleams. Sounds of music are in his ears. He knows what is coming—that glorious vision of an Eastern scene—palm trees—desert sands—enchanted cities in the distance—golden

rivers—amber skies—heavenly shapes. He keeps full possession of his identity; he has learned so to graduate the dose that he can do this—knows what amount will serve to make his speech eloquent, bring glowing visions or passing forgetfulness, as he lists. To-night he wants the vision, and it is near; the stately music always announces its approach. Suddenly there is a jar, a break—a discord in the grand diapason. The vision floats slowly up, and fills the immeasurable space; but, horrible, it is only the hot Court-room, the eager crowd, the crouching form of Milady, that present themselves. It is the first time the spell has ever failed; he is sufficiently conscious to struggle, to separate reality from the dream.

He thrusts the papers into the drawer, closes the desk, flings off his coat, and lies down on the bed. The music re-commences—slow, stately —crash after crash of golden harmony. Great ivory doors swing wide—he is entering the charmed realm. He cannot move now—cannot lift a finger; he must drift on. But he sees that dwarfish gnomes guard the portals instead of the radiant forms he knows as well as the faces of his most familiar friends. The Eastern scene is there; the palms, the desert, the enchanted city. But side by side, jumbled

with the vision in inextricable confusion, yet apart from it, a sort of shadow though full of awful reality, the Court-room, the crouching figure, and the mighty orchestra, from organ tones to voice of flute, only wails and echoes that dismal cry — "The child! O God, the child!"

Always bound hand and foot; no more able to stir than if his frame had been of marble. Still the vision sweeps on, beauty and its dreadful shadow side by side. Out of the farther past troop shapes and memories. Faces and voices which perhaps he has not seen or heard for years—loves and hates so fierce that it would be hard to tell which was the most cruel.

But whatever he sees or hears, always there comes back at last the Court-room, the crowd, and Milady crouching there, while her white lips repeat in mockery the pet name of other days,—the name to which she has clung in her fall and degradation, perhaps only in scorn and bitterness of her own self, but clinging to it still.

What else does he behold? Always the palm-trees and the broad plains with their magic light, but they serve merely as the theatre upon which this drama of recollection plays itself out.

Does he see himself arrived in Moysterville? Does he listen again to the frightened servants' account of the paralysis which struck his uncle only the day before, after receiving a visit from a stranger—a woman? The two incidents are not, in the minds of the speakers, connected with the illness; but they relate them as people, in such a season of alarm, laboriously go over the slightest events that immediately precede the disaster. Does he hear Mr. Carstoe's voice, with its piteous croak—like a constant lament over life's disappointments—relating, also on the evening of his arrival, the affair of the codicil; telling him of the lawyer's death; uncertain of the contents of the will, but positive as to the codicil?

Does he see himself, two nights later, in the library, secretly searching among the papers? Does he read again the revelations which caused so horrible a shock to the old man that his enfeebled frame could not support the blow? Is he back in the room on the night his uncle died, seeking to destroy those terrible records?

Does he see suddenly the haggard face of Milady rise like a menacing ghost? Does he despise her threats, and let her go? Does he wait until a few more days have seen the

old man laid in his grave, to find the strong arm of the law relieving him of this wretched woman who has dared to threaten him in her madness? Does he see himself visiting her in prison, overwhelming her by the one plea that could move her? Does he hear her frantic appeal, "The child! the child!"? Does he go over again the bestowal upon her of the drug which, long ago, she learned to crave—the drug which keeps her in a state of semi-idiocy up to the very hour of the trial—with a vague fear of him controlling her always and sealing her lips, though her stupefied mind can scarcely realize why, until when all is over, and the dreadful sentence pronounced, memory and consciousness break forth anew in that passionate moan, "The child! the child!"?

Yes, he sees it all, lives it all over, and suffers—he who, in his normal state, has so slight capability of suffering. He writhes and moans, but cannot break the spell. Then a great darkness gathers: he sinks down—down. The eastern plain is a sea of blood. Towers and palm-trees are fiery fountains afar off; he in the dark; and he falls, falls, slowly, slowly down an awful height, down a terrible eternity into a dull, dead insen-

sibility, which holds no thought, no perception.

But the morrow's sun has risen. Two days come and go. Mr. Carstoe and Vaughan are speeding toward San Francisco. Only a brief waiting there, and he is on the great steamer bound homeward, and, once arrived at the great Atlantic sea-port, another steamer bears him away to the old world, and his face is full of life and hope, and the past is as dead for him as if it had never existed.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE GALLERY.

Monsieur La Tour had come to pay a morning visit to his affianced; it was not his habit to appear until the afternoon, but he was obliged to go down to Geneva to-day, and Nathalie, seized by one of her sudden caprices, had ordered him, on the previous night, to bring her a bouquet of flowers before his departure.

So Monsieur appeared at the chalet at ten o'clock. Madame L'Estrange was not yet visible, but old Susanne played propriety during the interview, Madame L'Estrange being fully alive to the indecorum of a young lady's receiving her affianced husband alone. The coachman had begged permission to drive on to Clarens while Monsieur paid his visit, promising faithfully to be back in time to meet the boat.

Nathalie proved so teazing and capricious, that the little elderly gentleman spent an

unquiet half-hour. Old Susanne was cross this morning, and with reason, for in the middle of the night Madame had been attacked with one of her nervous spasms, and insisted on Susanne's saying a score of long prayers, and then, relapsing from piety into worldliness, kept her till near daylight discussing mundane matters. So Susanne, feeling at war with the human race in general, suddenly announced that it was almost time for the boat, and informed Monsieur, with malicious satisfaction, that the carriage had not returned.

"You will have to walk to the landing," said Nathalie, when a consultation of watches and clocks proved that Susanne was correct, as well as ill natured, in her remark.

"But that faithless *cocher*, where is he?" moaned Monsieur, with the theatrical gestures and appearance of utter despair which, like the rest of his countrymen, he displayed on every possible occasion. "He is a fiend—the son of a demon! My business is most important! I desire to go by the boat,—the train invariably causes my head to ache, and he knows it,—the accursed wretch knows it well."

"That may be; but if Monsieur waits any longer he will not get the boat, that is certain,"

pronounced Susanne, with the easy familiarity of a French domestic.

Nathalie clapped her hands and laughed, and Monsieur La Tour looked at her over his spectacles with mild reproach.

"Mademoiselle can be amused at my perplexity!" quavered he.

"Oh, no, Monsieur; I was only remembering that not to reach the boat would give me the pleasure of your society," returned Nathalie, uttering the polite falsehood with all a woman's —a Frenchwoman's—glibness.

"I am touched; I am overwhelmed!" cried Monsieur; for Nathalie did not treat him often enough to pretty speeches for them to lose their effect. "But, *mon amie*, I am forced to go to Geneva to-day. I have made certain business arrangements; I desire to purchase—but it is needless to weary you with explanations."

"Then if Monsieur wishes to go by the eleven o'clock boat, he must be off," chanted Susanne, monotonously. Susanne was sleepy, and wanted him gone, that she might secure a little doze before it was time to dress her mistress.

"We shall walk a little way with you," Nathalie said. "Come, Susanne. You like

an early promenade, Susanne; you know you do."

Susanne made a dissatisfied grimace; but as refusal was out of the question, she scorned to offer any observation whatever.

The three set off, and were seen by Elizabeth Crauford, who had left the house to enjoy the delicious morning. Not far below the villa grounds was a steep hill overhanging the road, walled and terraced to the top, with vines growing on the terraces. The hill made part of a private property; but Elizabeth had walked up a side road which gave admittance thereto, and a courteous gardener had permitted her to enter. She had strolled on to the brow of the hill, and seated herself in a summer-house which commanded a lovely view.

Along came her acquaintance of the previous evening; of course the natty, carefully-dressed little man by her side was Monsieur La Tour. Elizabeth regarded him with a natural womanly interest. He had taken off his hat for an instant, and she could see his wig distinctly. She turned, with as natural a thrill of girlish sympathy, to look at Nathalie walking by his side, overtopping him somewhat, lithe and graceful, her hair shining like gold in the sun, and her face brightened by its most mischievous smile.

They were just under the hill now—Elizabeth had to lean forward to see them. Up scuttled Susanne, her tall Breton cap wavering to and fro in her haste, like a miniature tower shaking in the wind.

"The boat!" she shrieked; "the boat!"

"Just heaven, all is lost!" groaned Monsieur.

Then a tableau. Susanne a statue of reproach and self-satisfaction; Monsieur with one hand clutching the wig which he did not dare to pull, his spectacles raised to the heaven he had invoked; Nathalie with her head averted, but her countenance brimfull of mischief and enjoyment plainly visible to Elizabeth. A person unacquainted with French manners might have supposed, from the melo-dramatic attitudes of Monsieur and the old woman, that some terrible catastrophe had occurred, but Miss Crauford felt certain the case deserved no very profound sympathy.

"If Monsieur runs, but runs very fast," suggested Susanne, suddenly bursting into speech, —"the boat is only at Clarens, I heard the whistle,—Monsieur might catch it yet at the lower landing."

"Ah, do try," cried Nathalie. "You know the motion of the train always makes you ill, *mon ami*."

"I shall try," sighed Monsieur. "*Au revoir, chère* Nathalie; *au revoir*."

"Yes, yes, but do not stop to kiss my hand; *vite, vite*," pleaded Nathalie.

Monsieur still hesitated; he had no fancy for displaying his powers of rapid locomotion to that audience.

"The whistle!" cried Susanne.

"And your head—the train will make you ill!" from Nathalie.

Away bounded poor Monsieur, as an elderly gazelle might bound; his coat-tails flew out like twin banners of distress, his wig bobbed up and down, and threatened to desert him utterly. Elizabeth Crauford leaned back in her seat and laughed silently; Susanne watched with a face divided between amusement and ill temper; and Nathalie clapped her hands and danced.

Monsieur's style of racing was peculiar; those elderly gazelle bounds seemed more like ineffectual efforts to leap up an imaginary height than well-directed attempts to reach a goal lying far down the smooth curving road. Full five minutes of that gazelle business ensued, yet Monsieur was not a hundred yards away. Another scream from Susanne,—

"The boat! the boat!"

A burst of laughter from Nathalie, echoed by

sounds of merriment from Miss Crauford's retreat, a groan from Monsieur, and a cessation of the mad bounds. He stood for a few instants watching the boat as she swept down the bay-like curve, then walked slowly back, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, speechless between annoyance and exhaustion.

"You must wait till to-morrow," was Nathalie's first remark.

"I have business—I shall go to-day," returned Monsieur; and though his voice sounded like the expiring wheeze of a broken bellows, the words expressed a firm resolve to do his duty, though he perished in the attempt.

"There is a train at half-past eleven," chanted Susanne, in her shrill tones.

"We will walk to the station with you," Nathalie said.

"You are very good—always," sighed Monsieur, displaying a spirit of forgiveness which ought to have overwhelmed the naughty sprite with remorse, but produced no effect whatever.

"Madame will want me," put in Susanne crossly, her last hope of getting a half-hour's peaceful slumber destroyed by this cruel proposal on Nathalie's part.

"Mamma will not rise till noon; she never does," said the girl. "Susanne, I suspect you of some dark design! There must be a man in the case, or you would not be so insane to get back to the house."

"For shame, Mademoiselle; before Monsieur!" grumbled Susanne, yet secretly pleased at the idea that such notions could still be imputed to her. "What will Monsieur think?"

"Monsieur will think whatever I bid him," cried Nathalie. "Is it not so, *mon ami?* Poor dear! how warm he is—ah! it is too bad!"

She seized his handkerchief, and actually wiped his forehead. Monsieur was so overcome by her goodness that he could only gasp.

"Bah, it smells of snuff!" exclaimed Nathalie, suddenly thrusting the handkerchief into his hand. "*Allons!* It is fortunate this train stops at Burier."

Burier was a little station just back of the hill where Elizabeth Crauford sat, only a few minutes' walk from the high road. Nathalie danced along by Monsieur's side, and Susanne followed in grim silence; but her faded lips moved, and it was evident, from the expression of her countenance, that she was not calling

down blessings on the heads of her mistress and her mistress's betrothed husband.

"I forgot,"—Monsieur stopped short as he spoke, and once more despair darkened his heated countenance,—"I have not my paletot and my *sac de voyage*—both in the carriage. Ah, that fiendish man!"

"Well, there he comes now," called Susanne, who seemed the goddess of discovery in person this morning.

Sure enough, now that it was too late, the carriage appeared up the road, and halted before the side gates which were close to the chalet.

"Fiend with a donkey's head," shouted Susanne, "can you not come on then? Are you blind as well as an idiot that you do not see us standing here?"

Her shrill voice rang out like a cracked trumpet, and, as the coachman urged forward his steed, her tones changed to withering sarcasm. "Ah, yes, now that it is too late thou canst come; thou canst be in great haste; thou canst beat thy poor horse! *Hé!* Lout, fiend, seventh son of seven times seven brigands, come on then, come!"

She danced up and down in the road, and shook her fists and her cap, until a horse un-

accustomed to living among people of her country would have dashed off in a fright; but neither horse nor driver paid the slightest attention to the dramatic burst whereby she somewhat relieved her long pent-up ill humour. As he neared the group, the coachman lifted his hat, and explained, in his slow, Swiss fashion, that the delay had not been owing to any fault of his. Monsieur could see that he had another horse. Would Monsieur just observe that?

"Stolen, no doubt; thief, assassin," shouted Susanne.

"Susanne, I will have you drowned in the lake if you do not remain quiet," observed her young mistress, calmly.

"But she is right; the man's conduct is unpardonable," cried Monsieur, glaring at the guilty wretch through his spectacles as ferociously as his kindly eyes could manage.

"Let him explain," ordered Nathalie, animated by a not unusual spirit of contradiction. "Tell us what detained you, my good man."

The coachman announced his conviction that Mademoiselle was an angel. There was a fiendish chuckle from Susanne; but whether intended to express anger at the guilty wretch's presumption, or scorn of the young lady's claims

to the title he had bestowed upon her, did not appear.

"Indeed, Mademoiselle, it was not my fault. I set out in ample time. I had accomplished half the distance, when my stupid brute of a horse stumbled, and lamed himself. I had to tie him to a gate, and go back to Clarens for another."

If ever a sound from human throat, half a snort, half a laugh, expressed utter incredulity and contempt, it was the sound wherewith Susanne greeted this explanation. But she had no time to speak; Monsieur quickly interposed, and so weary that he only asked to get where he could sit down and rest, said, with touching resignation,—

"Well, well; give me the paletot and the *sac de voyage*. I go by train."

"I can take Monsieur and the lady to the station."

"No, no, it is only three steps," interrupted Nathalie.

"*Hé!* a step is a step, and my legs are fifty years old. I shall be driven," cried Susanne, indignant that the coachman had not included her in his proffer. She mounted nimbly into the carriage, and sat up as erect as if her spinal column had been a steel bar. "Go on then,"

she exclaimed, in grim triumph; "and if my neck is broken by your stupidity, it shall cost you dear, if I have to bring the case before every court in Switzerland, should there be such a thing as justice in this accursed land. Go on!"

The Swiss gave her one glare from under his bushy eyebrows; but she looked so warlike, so bristling with a desire for battle, that he did not venture upon a syllable in reply. Susanne spared him neither taunt nor gibe as the horse toiled up the steep little hill, and Nathalie and Monsieur followed.

The carriage stopped at the station: Susanne descended, paletot and sack in hand; descended in silence, for she was at the end of her breath, if not of her eloquence.

"*Hé!*" called the coachman, suddenly taking advantage of her condition. "Devil—she-devil—daughter of the fiend! A witch—a wrinkled witch—*hé, hé.*"

He lashed his horse into a gallop, and dashed off. Susanne dropped the bag; recovered from her first stupor; made a movement as if to pursue the retreating wretch; but the vehicle disappeared, and she passed on into the station with a face which would have caused a sphinx to laugh.

The train steamed up, and cut short Monsieur's pathetic little adieus. A frantic guard, who looked as if he had been born in a hurry and had been in a hurry ever since, bundled the elderly gentleman into a compartment with irreverent haste, and shouted the signal for departure. Monsieur, gallant to the last, struggled up from the recumbent posture into which the guard's violence had forced him, tried to lean out of the window to wave a last farewell, knocked his head against the door, lost his hat, nearly lost his wig, and fell back with a groan: it was a morning of disasters.

As Nathalie and Susanne descended the steps of the station, Miss Crauford was just coming down the road.

"I am so glad to see you," cried Nathalie, running towards her. "Are you tired? Would you like a long walk? I have the whole day to myself. Monsieur has gone to Geneva. Oh, he nearly lost his wig at the last! If you had seen it! But will you come? Please do! I have been so lonely here—so anxious for your arrival! Now, do not be stiff and stony, like an English girl—let us be friends at once."

"With all my heart," said Elizabeth, holding out her hand.

"Oh, the pretty hand!" cried Nathalie, look-

ing at the ungloved fingers with *naïve* admiration. "Nothing so pretty as an American hand. Mine is well, because it is half American; but yours is perfect. Only look, Susanne."

Susanne was dropping curtsies, her face radiant with smiles. She had heard that the new-comers were very grand people, and Susanne turned into a model of decorum and respect at once. Still she retained possession of her senses. Susanne hated long rambles, and had no mind to be dragged off on one of her mistress's wild expeditions, even in the society of the rich American.

"Dear Mademoiselle," she whimpered, "I am desolated; but, Madame, I must return to the house. That sweet suffering angel will require me."

"How vexatious!" cried Nathalie. "Mamma would be shocked at our going alone; and it is a shame to lose such a beautiful day."

"We might go to the house and find my maid, if some sort of protection is an absolute necessity," suggested Elizabeth, good-naturedly. Nathalie looked so pretty and childish that she could not bear to have her disappointed.

Susanne volubly pronounced this a most admirable suggestion. Mademoiselle was full of goodness and resources! It was a grief to her,

Susanne, not to be able to accompany the young ladies; but her duty, her duty!

"Susanne," retorted Nathalie, "do you remember my explaining to you, the other day, what an English word meant?"

"Ah, yes; ze hoomboog!" cried Susanne, proud to show her accomplishments before the stranger.

"Just so," said Nathalie; "and that is what you are, a humbug—the hugest one in existence."

She took Elizabeth's arm, and walked on. Susanne was crest-fallen for a few moments; but by the time they reached the gates she recovered her power of speech.

"Mademoiselle loves her joke," she said, apparently addressing nobody in particular. "Mademoiselle laughs at her Susanne; but she knows her worth and her fidelity notwithstanding."

All the while the old sycophant was wondering if some scheme could not be devised which should oust the young American's maid from her present enviable position, and transfer it to that embodiment of worth and fidelity christened Susanne.

While Nathalie ran into the chalet to obtain her mother's consent, Miss Crauford entered

the villa. Her father was up and dressed; but he was still neuralgic and sentimental, and though he talked a good deal of poetry about the scenery, was quite willing that Elizabeth should begin making its acquaintance without the necessity of exertion on his part.

"Be sure you admire the view from the Montreux church," he said; "it was your dear mother's favourite spot. Ah, well! I must not try too much at first. I am not strong, and each haunt here is so full of memories. And there 's a young lady at the chalet—L'Estrange —very good name—is to marry a Monsieur La Tour. Hum, ha!—I once knew a La Tour. Yes; go by all means. In general I do not approve of intimacies with strangers; but it seems these people are quite safe. Madame Bocher tells me they are most respectable. Yes, exactly—"

And his speech drivelled into nothingness, after his habit. He seldom brought his halting remarks to an end; they just faded away in ejaculations; an irritating, indolent fashion, which made one long to shake a little energy into him.

Mr. Crauford had been a valetudinarian for the last ten years—a sore trial to himself and everybody about him. The worst of it was

that he could write verses, and this caused him to believe himself a poet. He never had gone beyond publishing a few stray rhymes in some newspaper, but he believed himself a genius, kept back from toil and fame by ill health. His genius served as an excuse for all sorts of ill humours and selfishness. But he was not a bad man at bottom, only a weak one, and fortunately for his daughter's peace, her influence over him was very great.

Elizabeth had expected demur on his part as to allowing her to make acquaintance with the French girl, until by some means every particular in regard to her and her mother had been got at. Mr. Crauford was given to suspicion of strangers — a man very severe too in his judgments of his acquaintances. Mr. Crauford could tolerate neither slip nor stumble. He was as unmerciful as certain elderly women; so very unmerciful, that ill-natured people sometimes wondered, as such persons do in regard to those female censors, whether somewhere in his youth there had not been peccadilloes or worse to cover up. Naturally, Elizabeth thought nothing of the kind. She did not even admit to herself, what at the bottom her clear judging mind must have known, that in the present instance her father yielded just because it was

a personal convenience. Elizabeth loved her father, and hid his selfishness from her sight, concealing it under pretty names and generous excuses; and it spoke well for her character that she did so.

Having given his consent cheerfully, his next speech was to urge the propriety of her remaining at home. But Elizabeth was too thoroughly accustomed to such change and vacillation on his part to feel surprise, and too determined to preserve her illusions in regard to her father, for either amusement or contempt. It was just a habit of papa's—invalids always fell into certain odd ways—people possessing the poetic temperament especially. Elizabeth, with all her desire to elevate her parent on a lofty pedestal, could not persuade herself that he was a poet; but to attribute the poetic temperament to him made a very satisfactory and well-sounding excuse for his vagaries.

They had luncheon together in an upper room, which Mr. Crauford decided to appropriate as a study. Wherever he went he must have a study: it served at least as a place in which to smoke and doze comfortably. Madame Bocher wondered why they could not take all their meals in the dining-room, and informed Gervais that "if they went on this way

they would find plenty of extra-service in the month's bill." Gervais had the luncheon-tray in his own hands, and being a humorist after his fashion, was so tickled by the idea of Madame's expecting to be paid for service rendered to Mr. Crauford by Mr. Crauford's domestic, that he nearly dropped dishes and plates in his silent laughter.

Three separate times during the repast, Mr. Crauford was of the opinion that he would send for a carriage and accompany the young ladies; twice that Elizabeth had better remain at home. But these were trifling changes.

"You see I want a walk, papa," Elizabeth said patiently. "You must have a carriage come as usual each day; you must not give up your drive, and I shall go with you. But I must have my walks too, and ride donkeys. Mademoiselle L'Estrange says one can get such jolly obstinate little donkeys up at Montreux."

"The very thing. Well, I would advise you to-day to get donkeys, and go to the château of Rochelle." Exactly in the opposite direction to that decided on by the girls. "What do you say to going out on the lake in a boat?" This last suggestion, delivered with airy cheerfulness, as if Elizabeth had

been at a loss how to amuse herself, and he had hit on this proposal in his fatherly care.

"Certainly, papa, if you would like to go."

"My child!" in horror, "when you know I hate a sail-boat! Ah, me! young people are so heedless. Your dear mamma would never have forgotten that I detest a sail-boat. Indeed, I wonder you can ever wish to get into one; they're never safe. Elizabeth, we might go down in the train to Vevay, and see what we find in the way of horses and carriages to take by the month."

"Yes, papa."

"On the whole, Elizabeth, I suppose I am better off in the house; my neuralgia is very troublesome."

A tap at the door. Margot, Miss Crauford's maid, to say that Mademoiselle L'Estrange was waiting.

"Go, by all means, my love! Don't mind me; I shall get on very well," sighed Mr. Crauford.

He was anxious to be left alone, in order that he might indulge in more smoking and a longer nap than was reasonable; but the poetic temperament led him to veil this desire even from his own eyes under the pleasing shape of self-abnegation. Elizabeth understood the

truth as well as he, but she blinded herself too, and really felt pangs of reproach, as if she had been a hardened sinner, pursuing her own gratification at the expense of her father's comfort.

As she reached the porch in front of the villa, she saw Nathalie pacing up and down the gravel-walk which ran before the house and chalet.

"I thought you would never come," cried the French girl, hurrying forward to meet her new friend. "Mamma has been so tiresome; her head aches, and that makes her horribly pious. She says she wishes she had made a nun of me, instead of bringing me out of the convent to be married. I do think elderly people are dreadful; do not you?"

It was plain that Mademoiselle Nathalie made slight attempt to keep up illusions where *her* parent was concerned. Miss Crauford did not approve of this speech, so she returned no answer whatever. Nathalie gave her graceful head a toss and walked on; but as they reached the gate she stopped short and confronted her companion, looking rebellious and heated, though her eyes danced with mischief, in spite of her evident irritation.

"If you mean to be English and awful, I shall remain at home," said she.

"But I do not mean to be either."

"*À la bonne heure!*" cried Nathalie. "Then have the goodness not to look shocked at my foolish speeches. If I cannot say whatever comes into my head, I shall not talk with you."

Elizabeth laughed; the girl was so arch and child-like, that one could neither take offence nor think her rude.

"You look very handsome when you laugh," observed Nathalie; "you had better indulge in the exercise whenever you can, for your mouth is a little sad and stern.

"Never mind my mouth."

"Pardon, one ought always to mind pretty things."

"In the mean time the morning is passing; we shall have no walk," suggested Elizabeth. "Where is Margot?"

That eminently respectable female appeared at the door of the chalet, where she had been indulging in a little gossip with Susanne. They had formed acquaintance already; and as Susanne was too old to receive the least notice from Gervais, Margot felt in her heart a nascent friendship for her countrywoman. Could she have gained the slightest clue to the wild thought which had this morning crossed

Susanne's brain as to the possibility of exchanging her present service for that occupied by Mademoiselle Margot, the fiery Burgundian would have throttled the wily Breton on the door-step. Fortunately for the general harmony, no suspicion troubled Margot's mind, and the two parted amicably, and with as many mutual compliments as could have been devised by their betters.

Susanne watched the two take the road which struck across the hills directly in front of the gates, and wished rather enviously that she were not elderly and stout and very lazy. Then she went through the dark passage, with two bed-rooms on one side, and a little *salon* at the end. From here, the only means of admittance to the rest of the habitable part of the chalet was by the long outer gallery, the front portion of the interior being occupied by great *pressoirs* and casks, where later the wine would be made. Two more bed-rooms gave on the gallery; then came glass-doors, which led into a large, comfortable *salon*. Beyond was a dining-room, a back passage connecting with all these chambers, a kitchen opposite the *salle à manger*, and another covered gallery at the back, which overlooked the Vevay road and the route among the hills.

Susanne heard her mistress's voice from the bed-room, and immediately burst into a cheerful flood of song. Her notes were a little sharp and cracked, but she sang with a will.

"Are you never coming? Am I never to be dressed?" called the peevish accents.

Susanne was traversing the *salon* by this time; she checked her music. "*Dieu!*" cried she; "if I did not think Madame was having a little repose after her chocolate."

"Come here this instant," ordered Madame.

"*Moulin qui dort, qui dort*," chanted Susanne, as she reached the passage into which her mistress's bed-room opened. "The young ladies are off," she said, gaily. "Does Madame desire to get up and be dressed?"

"You are a wicked woman," cried the fretful voice from the bed.

Susanne stood in the doorway and shrugged her shoulders. "Madame has her nerves," she murmured.

"I have nothing of the sort," contradicted Madame. "I am thinking about my soul, and yours, and everybody's. No one ever tried so hard to make their salvation as I do. I have said twenty *paternosters* this morning, and have gone through the Litany of St. Barbara without missing a line."

"Then I am sure Madame ought to be comfortable; she has done enough for one day," returned Susanne soothingly.

"I have never done enough, and I am so tired," moaned Madame.

"I shall give Madame her drops," said Susanne.

She bustled about and prepared the potion; it was to be administered in curaçoa, and Susanne made the dose of liqueur very strong. It told favourably and immediately upon the weak, emaciated woman. She sat up among her pillows, twisted the curls of her still luxuriant hair about her lean fingers, and said more cheerfully,—

"I think I will put on the new *robe de chambre* with the pink trimmings, Susanne, and the head-dress to match; perhaps Monsieur le Curé will kindly look in before night."

"Good," thought Susanne; "at least she is away from her prayers and her salvation for a little! Of course one must think about such things when one is as near one's end as Madame, but that is no reason for wearying those in health. It is my firm belief that Madame will not more than last through the autumn," pursued Susanne in her meditations, while getting out the new gown with the pink

trimmings. "She might as well not tumble and spoil her prettiest clothes by lying about in them. But, bah, Madame was always selfishness incarnate—she never thinks of me, in spite of my devotion. As for dying—well, I thought the same last year that I do now, and here she is yet; that woman is made of iron."

Madame in bed, with a cap concealing her hair and all the lines showing in her worn features, was a very different looking object from Madame carefully dressed, with a little rouge dropped into her sunken cheeks, and her spirits elevated by the tonic and the curaçoa. She had been a wonderfully handsome woman, and her great flashing eyes were yet beautiful, though unnaturally bright. She suffered a great deal of pain, which she bore philosophically enough. She was slowly dying of some internal disease, but she had been so long about it, that, like Susanne, she had her doubts whether she might not live as long as other people after all. She was horribly afraid of death; she tried very hard to make her salvation, as she expressed it, but it was tiresome work. Madame had lived a gay life, and she hankered still after her old pleasures; and sometimes the old fiery spirit came up, and she fairly cursed in the midst of her prayers, in a

sort of desperate rage at having lost her youth, her beauty, and the health which had rendered both gifts enjoyable. She liked to bemoan her past sins to her spiritual director. She really thought she did it from contrition and remorse, but in reality there was a satisfaction in living over those memories, even while she smote her breast and grew frightened lest the errors should drag her down to hell in spite of her prayers and penances.

"I find myself wonderfully well to-day," she observed to Susanne. "I wish Monsieur La Tour had not gone to Geneva. But it is a comfort to be rid of Nathalie; she is so full of spirits, so well and strong, that child!"

Susanne smiled secretly. She was very shrewd, this godless, hard-headed old woman. There were days when Madame fairly hated Nathalie for her beauty, and her youth, and her health, though she loved her daughter in her own way—sometimes in a rather tigress sort of way. Susanne understood every one of her mistress's weaknesses, and amused her monotonous life by studying them, quite unconscious that she was a kind of heathen philosopher in her fashion.

"Susanne," said Madame, "I think if I was well wrapped up I might sit in the gallery. I

can't walk about the grounds to-day; I had a little pain in the night, and it leaves my legs weak."

Susanne moved out a low easy chair, enveloped her mistress in a great shawl, and established the invalid comfortably. The sun was warm and bright; the birds sang in the walnut trees; the waters lapped musically against the shore. Madame could look down the lake where the light lay golden and beautiful. But Madame had never cared much for Nature; the dullest street in Paris would have been more lovely in her eyes than the grandest landscape. Only the express commands of her physician kept her in this quiet spot. Life had lost all interest; she was fearfully bored; she suffered martyrdom from physical pain; still Madame clung to the existence she hated, and was even content to bury herself in this stupid Swiss valley, since in so doing lay her one hope of putting off that last solitary journey she dreaded.

"I think I might read a little," she said, as Susanne stood watching her with a cynical face, amused to see how natural it was to Madame to pose and put herself in a graceful attitude, although there was no one to see—no man, that is; women had never any importance in

Madame's creed. "There is a new book under my pillow, Susanne; I hid it for fear Nathalie should find it."

Susanne went in search of the volume and returned with it in her hand—a novel—an autobiography of a Parisian gallant, whose revelations were enough to make one's hair stand on end.

"I said the whole Litany of St. Barbara," murmured Madame; "I might indulge myself, I think. Remind me to go over the Offerings of St. Joseph before dinner, Susanne."

Some sound from below roused Madame; she raised herself among her pillows and glanced through the railings. Mr. Crauford had strolled out of the villa and approached the chalet. He was standing on the lawn now, speaking with the *fermier*. Madame's eyes—those sunken, feverishly bright eyes—were as sharp as an eagle's, and Madame possessed a memory which neither illness nor time had touched.

Mr. Crauford's face was turned full towards her as he stood; Madame looked curiously down, looked more closely; a puzzled expression crossed her features, and was succeeded by a great trouble. She caught hold of the balustrade with both hands to steady herself,

for a nervous trembling began to shake her whole frame.

Presently Mr. Crauford walked slowly on, and was lost to sight among the trees. Madame fell back in her chair; her eyes closed; her breath came in quick, convulsive gasps. After awhile, Susanne, busy in the further room, heard her mistress's voice in the sharp, broken tone which denoted one of her attacks of pain. She hurried out, and found Madame leaning weak and helpless against her cushions, a ghastly grey pallor overspreading her countenance—a pallor rendered the more dreadful from its contrast to the painted spots in her hollow cheeks. Susanne had sometimes seen her look like this when awakening suddenly from a bad dream, or when a fear of death came over her.

"Madame is suffering," she said, kindly enough. "Is it the old pain?"

The woman made a motion that she wished to go indoors. Susanne wheeled her chair through the open window into the *salon*. Madame was no great weight now-a-days.

Susanne went off in search of restorative medicines, moving rapidly, and speaking good-naturedly, though she did think it selfish of the invalid to cause her so much trouble.

"She looks very odd," was Susanne's secret comment, as she worked over her. "Each attack seems to get worse. Anybody else would soon go to bits; but there, Madame was born with a constitution like a horse; she is iron, no less!"

Madame lay down on the sofa for some time; gradually the trembling ceased, the face lost its drawn expression. Susanne knew the *crise* had passed.

"It was only fatigue," Madame said, after awhile; "I am better now."

"Shall I bring Madame a soup?" Susanne asked, wondering, as she often did, at the fortitude with which the woman fought against these attacks.

"No; I could not take it yet; I will have some more drops presently." She lay quiet again for a little. Susanne thought she was dropping into a doze, but she half opened her eyes, and asked, "What did you say was the name of the new people in the villa? English people, I think Nathalie told me they were."

Susanne was accustomed to such efforts on Madame's part to distract her mind when suffering.

"They are Americans," the old woman answered, quite ready to converse, if her mis-

tress was able to listen; "though I can see no difference between the two; they all talk the same impossible jargon."

"Americans!" repeated Madame, in a low tone.

"Yes, Mademoiselle says America is very far off—Oh, farther than Sicily, even."

"I dare say," returned Madame absently, who, in her character of Frenchwoman, was probably almost as ignorant of geography as Susanne.

"When people live so far away, I wonder they are not content to keep at home," pursued Susanne. "Not that one has anything to say against them. The father is rather tiresome with his fancies, Madame Bocher says; but the demoiselle is as sweet a lady as one could wish to see. She is fond of our little Nathalie, too."

"Ah!" said Madame. She had her head turned away; there was a very peculiar expression in her face; she looked as if trying to make herself believe that she had been disturbed by some accidental resemblance when she saw the stranger standing below her balcony. Twice her lips parted to ask a question; twice she checked the words, afraid that the answer would only confirm the truth of what

she was endeavouring to regard as a fancy of her own.

In the meanwhile, Susanne ran on volubly in her account of the strangers. She was interested even in the strength of their coffee, knew exactly how many pairs of stockings the young lady carried among her possessions—Margot had given the information—and the number was almost incredible to Susanne.

"Ah," said Madame again, without having heard a syllable of the monologue. "And their name is Lisbet, is it not?"

"No, no; that is the name of the demoiselle, or some outlandish name like it. How is it one says the other—*le nom de famille?* Wait —I have it—Monsieur—Oh, those accursed English names!—Ah, Monsieur Crau-ford," panted Susanne, with great difficulty.

As Madame asked the question, she raised her head from the pillow, awaiting the answer with an eagerness which escaped her companion. Once more a hollow groan startled the Breton. Madame had fallen back on the sofa, and fainted completely away.

CHAPTER V.

MONSIEUR'S RETURN.

MONSIEUR LA TOUR certainly deserved a warm welcome on his return from what he would have called "*son petit voyage*," for not only had he found leisure to purchase an exceedingly pretty bracelet to clasp on his betrothed's arm, but Madame L'Estrange and Susanne were both remembered. Monsieur displayed a happy tact, too, where Madame was concerned. He brought her some illuminated legends of a favourite saint, which gratified her superstitious attempts to be what she termed religious; and he added a quantity of carved boxes and other articles for her toilette-table, lest her worldly mood should chance to be uppermost on his arrival, and cause her to regard the legends and their pictures with secret disfavour.

Madame was charmed; she examined the fancifully shaped bottles of rare scent, the porcelain ornaments twisted into heathen gods, with the glee of an old baby; and Susanne

was almost equally delighted. Then a pain seized Madame in her back. She ordered the pretty vanities to be put out of sight, and began her jeremiades and frightened prayers; but there Susanne could not follow her,—she could stand in no need of either herself, while her health was so perfect as at present.

"Tell Nathalie to take Monsieur out on the lawn, Susanne," said Madame dolefully. "Oh, my back!—Oh, my sins!—I am the most wretched woman alive! I have no peace here, and I shall have none hereafter, and I try so hard! I wanted a taste of *confitures* yesterday, and I would not touch them just by way of penance, and I save and save from my annuity in order to leave something to the Convent of the Sacré Cœur. The Superior is almost a saint; she promised to have prayers said for me, and only to think, Susanne, she was once a sinner like the worst of us. Yes, indeed, she was put into that very convent by her family to quiet a horrible *esclandre*, and now she is at the head, and would rather than not live on pulse and lentils the whole year. I do not think people deserve half so much credit when they can make their salvation so easily! Here she is a saint nearly, and will escape purgatory, and I—Oh, Susanne! dear Susanne! send for the Curé; I am

worse—I die—send for the Curé, I implore thee!"

"To the devil with the Curé," was exactly what Susanne thought. "The poor silly soul is frightened enough now. She shall have a draught, hot and strong, to steady her nerves, and then she will forget about purgatory for a little while. Really, the best she can do is to die as soon as Mademoiselle is married, for this becomes of a tedium that is insupportable; it is too much to be tortured here and scorched hereafter also."

Down by the lake Nathalie and Monsieur encountered Elizabeth Crauford, and Elizabeth liked him for his quaint, old-fashioned manners, and long compliments which sounded like speeches out of a last-century's romance. She felt vexed with Nathalie for laughing at him, but Monsieur did not seem greatly to mind, and looked at her over his spectacles with beaming admiration. He was so little, so dainty in his dress, so marvellous in his bows, that it might have been difficult for this irreverent youthful generation not to smile at his antiquated elegancies; but Elizabeth read goodness and probity in every line of his face—a certain strength of will and determination, too—and she conceived a respect for him accordingly.

After awhile Mr. Crauford came out to sun himself for a space, and the four spent a very pleasant afternoon, and Nathalie yawned less than she was in the habit of doing during her affianced's visits.

Mr. Crauford and Monsieur discovered that they had been slightly acquainted some ten years ago in Paris, and felt now—as acquaintances meeting in a very quiet spot are apt to —as if they had been old friends.

"They will play piquet and talk together," thought Nathalie. "What a mercy! How droll they both are! I should like to tie their coat-tails together, and hear them go *crac* when they tried to get up! It is very tiresome, to be sure. I would rather be married; then I should get to Paris, at least! I am sure I shall turn wrinkled and grey if I do not soon find some excitement. How can Elizabeth listen so patiently to their prosing? I am half afraid of her, but I do love her already, and I wish she had not come."

Elizabeth was listening with more than patience, she was interested in the conversation. Her father talked very well when he forgot himself,—his fancied ailments and his poetical temperament,—and if Monsieur was a little heavy and stilted in his speech, every-

thing he said displayed good sense and culture. Elizabeth was more inclined than ever to think Nathalie ungrateful. The girl needed exactly such a guardian and protector as she would find in Monsieur. He would keep her from follies, and perhaps teach her the Latin grammar. One must excuse Elizabeth, for as yet she had no perception of what love really meant,—not the very slightest breath had stirred her heart in its maiden slumber. It was plain that Monsieur adored the wilful girl, and to Elizabeth it seemed only fitting that she should love him in return, just from gratitude.

Monsieur had lived to be fifty without falling in love; he had property enough not to need any young woman's *dot*, nor would this usual reason for marriage among his countrymen have influenced him. His mother had lived until within the last few years, and that gentle lady ruled him all her life. He had vegetated calmly in his provincial town; going occasionally to Paris for a change; had attended to his duties as proprietor; had sometimes been mayor and once préfet, and had grown elderly almost without perceiving it.

Less than a twelvemonth ago he had gone one day, while in Paris, to visit a distant relative, the Superior of the convent in which

Nathalie had been a pupil from childhood. While Monsieur sat conversing with the old lady, who liked an occasional gossip about the outer world, Nathalie entered the room to ask some favour of the worthy head of the establishment. Monsieur was dazed by the radiant vision. Monsieur turned into an antique Romeo at once, and nobody could have been more astonished than he at the transformation.

Monsieur was very attentive to his relative during his stay in the capital, and contrived to see Nathalie several times. Inquiries in regard to her family were less favourable than could have been wished. There were very odd stories connected with the youth of Madame L'Estrange—nothing distinct to be got at,—so pass those stories over as Monsieur did. Madame had married an American, had lived with him in Italy, had held a certain position among a tolerably respectable world. Soon after the birth of her child her husband had separated from her. There was gossip, but the actual reasons were never known. Madame at this time had a small property left her by a relative: she took that and the relative's name. Only a few years later she fell into ill health. Long since she had retired into complete seclusion and been forgotten.

Monsieur was alone; Monsieur was in love, so in spite of these discouraging circumstances, he sought Madame L'Estrange and told his story. He did not do this without reflection. He would have put Nathalie from his heart if he could, but that being impossible, his obstinacy helped him to disregard the scruples which prudence suggested. The fact of Madame's change of name must prevent the quiet people, among whom Monsieur La Tour's wife would live, from connecting her in any way with the old scandals in regard to her parent. Nathalie was sent for to Dijon, where her mother was staying. She saw Monsieur twice; then she accompanied her mother to Switzerland. Monsieur arranged his affairs, and that done, came on to claim his bride, for long engagements are never in favour among his countrymen. The *corbeille* would arrive next week, the marriage would take place very soon after. In the mean time Monsieur sunned himself in such smiles as Nathalie could be induced to bestow, and was too loyal and honest ever to admit in his soul the slightest suspicion that he had been either hasty or unwise.

There the four sat and talked pleasantly in the soft golden light, while the waves sang, and the breeze whispered of the Italian plains across which it had blown. Nathalie threw aside her

listlessness, because Elizabeth was attracting attention, and set herself to the task of fascinating the two elderly gentlemen—a task in which she succeeded without difficulty.

It did not occur to Elizabeth to be jealous of her success; she enjoyed the creature's gay chatter as much as either of their companions, and Nathalie saw that.

"How different she is from me," mused the girl; "now I should have hated her if I had not succeeded in attracting their attention from her. Ah, well; one's character is one's character; it is useless to struggle against it."

Mr. Crauford brought her away from her doubtful philosophy, by observing, "I trust we shall soon have the pleasure of making your mother's acquaintance, Mademoiselle."

The conversation was carried on wholly in French, because Monsieur La Tour, Gaul-like, was beautifully ignorant of any language except his own. As soon as he attempted a laboured or complimentary speech, Mr. Crauford's accent was so very marked that Nathalie had much ado not to mimic it. She was only deterred by the fear of offending Elizabeth, and her momentary struggle between her impulse and her dread kept her silent till Monsieur La Tour,

thinking that he understood the cause of her hesitation, hastened to add—

"The poor Madame is so terrible a sufferer! Nothing could gratify her more, I am convinced, than to share in the enjoyment which is just now permitted to Mademoiselle and myself." Here he bowed, first to Elizabeth, then to her father, by way of emphasizing his words. "But her nerves are in a sad state. She would gladly have come out to-day,—an attack of pain prevented—made it necessary even for us both to leave her."

"I know how to sympathize with illness," returned Mr. Crauford, in a martyr-like voice.

"Each is worse than the other," thought Nathalie. "Oh, I certainly would tie their coat-tails together if it were not for Elizabeth!" Then aloud, "Poor mamma; it is dreadful! And I am such a selfish little monster. I get away always when she is suffering from her attacks."

"Dear Mademoiselle, only because you cannot aid. If there was anything you could do, you would remain," said Monsieur, fearful that her careless speech might produce an unpleasant effect on the strangers.

"Please, do not try to make me out good," cried Nathalie, "else I shall disgrace myself and horrify you all immediately."

Monsieur was shocked; he never could accustom himself to Nathalie's conversation. He was relieved when Mr. Crauford and Elizabeth laughed heartily.

"Ah," thought Monsieur, "it must be the *esprit Américain;* they seem to comprehend her. A wild, rebellious nation those Americans. I am glad that little Nathalie is at least half French."

At length Mr. Crauford proposed a game of chess. A table was brought out under the walnut trees, and the two gentlemen soon became so absorbed in their occupation that the girls wandered away unnoticed to the edge of the lake.

"Now, let us talk," said Nathalie, as they sat down beneath the great willow. "We've not even Margot to bother us, so we need not confine ourselves to English. When I feel wicked, I prefer to speak French; and to-day I feel wicked."

"Do you mean cross—fractious?"

"No, no; wicked! Don't you understand? As my countrywoman felt when she said she could enjoy cold water if only it were a sin to drink it. Now you look shocked—are you?"

"Puzzled rather, I think," replied Elizabeth.

"I fancy you could not comprehend the feel-

ing I want to express," said Nathalie complacently. "To be sure it is all theory with me yet, but then my theories are immense."

"In regard to what?"

"Everything! Life—marriage—freedom!" cried Nathalie, her eyes shining, and the beautiful rose tints deepening in her cheeks.

"No," said Elizabeth austerely; "I do not comprehend you."

"You look horrified again," exclaimed Nathalie gaily. "You disapprove of what I said. I forget each instant that we are strangers; but, bah! friendship does not count by time—either one is fond of a person or one is not. When I fall in love, I mean it to be at a look—a glance—how do you say—first sight."

"Please to remember that you were just speaking of your marriage," retorted Miss Crauford austerely.

"*Qu'est-ce que ça fait? L'un n'empêche pas l'autre*," cried Nathalie with a merry laugh. "As if a woman was expected to love her own husband—bah, how tame!"

Elizabeth was accustomed to such sentiments in French novels, and certain English ones, but a little startled at hearing them so calmly enunciated by this childish-looking creature,

yet somewhat curious, too, to hear how far she would go in her borrowed theories.

"Are you more horrified than ever?" continued Nathalie, not trusting herself to the cold Saxon accents again.

"I think you are talking great nonsense," returned Elizabeth.

"Not nonsense at all!" exclaimed the other. "It is a truth—a solemn truth, if you will. Is it our fault? We young girls are dragged out like slaves in a market. Some wretched old Mohammedan intimates to our parents that he will take us with such and such a *dot*—the matter is arranged. 'Mademoiselle,' says the parent, 'behold your husband!' This is the first the girl has heard of the business. What can she do? She is given to him—disgusting!"

Her eyes flashed, her cheeks blazed. Elizabeth would have sympathized with her more deeply only that she felt convinced the girl was talking out of a novel, not expressing any deep personal dread or conviction.

"Do I not know?" pursued Nathalie. "It was thus with me. Monsieur La Tour was presented—not on trial, not that I might try and learn to like him, but as my affianced husband. Do you not consider that awful?"

"What did you do?" asked Elizabeth, rather Jesuitically.

"Do? I? Ah, well, just for the time I was so busy admiring a beautiful diamond ring he gave me—this is it—that I did not think much. I had always been insane to possess a diamond ring—Marie de Courcelles had one in the convent, and was so proud!"

She caught Elizabeth's somewhat cynical smile, and stopped.

"I wept bitterly enough when he was gone," she continued, after a pause; "but was I not powerless? Then opposition made mamma so ill that I dared not let her see my misery."

"Are you so very unhappy now?" asked Elizabeth.

"Oh, no; I do not much mind," replied Nathalie laughing. "One must marry—as well Monsieur La Tour as another. Only he thinks to bury me alive in that dull provincial town. I say nothing; but he will see. Mamma says, once married I can do what I please with him; on that account an elderly husband is much more *commode* than a young one."

"You want to live in Paris, I suppose?"

"Of course; could one exist elsewhere? I mean to have a *salon*—be a power—gather the lights of the literary world about me. I do not

care much for women, but there are a few I will have. I have arranged it all."

"If Monsieur La Tour consents!"

"If he does not—" she began, in a hard voice, which scarcely sounded like hers, then laughed, and added carelessly,—"*Alors, tant pis pour lui!* But never mind him. Do you know the works of—"

She ran glibly over certain names which I will not set down—names that were only such to Elizabeth.

"It is not possible you have read those books?" she exclaimed.

"What a child you are! I have read everything! We had a club in the convent; most of our books came through Blanche de Savigny's cousin—an angel, a god! He and Blanche adore one another; but Blanche is to marry a duke, an uglier man than Monsieur La Tour. But she will not give up her cousin; she is quite determined on that."

"You mean—"

"I mean just what I said! It is plain that you know nothing. They tell me American girls have odd ideas; that once married, they settle down patiently into a humdrum life—*si bête!* Blanche's aunt told her—"

"I do not wish to hear such talk," interrupted Elizabeth.

"Ah, do not be prudish, else I shall hate you! But it is no matter. I could not explain what Blanche said, for I did not understand myself, but she did. I never met a girl so wise as Blanche," and Nathalie gave a sigh expressive of admiration for Blanche's wisdom and regret at her own ignorance. "But she is an impassioned nature, and I am snow, Blanche says. She says if I run away from my husband, or make an *esclandre*, it will just be from pity for some one—"

"What a horrible creature she must be—a monster!" broke in Elizabeth, with indignant energy. "If she were still in the convent, I would write to the Superior, and tell her to be careful that girl did not teach others such things as she has you."

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders, and hummed a few bars of a gay song.

"Eh, if you go about setting trifles to rights," said she, "you will lose all power of seeing and fighting against great evils — it makes one small! A grain more or less wickedness is not of much consequence."

"I don't think we should agree with, or even understand, each other's ideas on these subjects," returned Miss Crauford coldly.

"Possibly not," assented Nathalie, with

complacency. "It requires a good deal of thought and study to see clearly from my standpoint. You may blame Blanche as much as you like, but I owe her a great deal. She is not a genius herself, but she makes others conscious of their genius."

Elizabeth burst out laughing. Nathalie looked first vexed, then scornful of her companion's lack of comprehension, then suddenly joined in the merriment.

"I forget you did not know I was a genius," said she; "but I am, all the same."

Elizabeth bowed mockingly. Nathalie turned away her head and remained silent for an unprecedented length of time, in her companion's brief knowledge of her. When Miss Crauford spoke, she started, and said reproachfully,—

"You brought me out of a dream—such an odd dream!"

"You dream altogether too much," chided Elizabeth.

"Would you know your destiny if you could?" demanded Nathalie. "I have been thinking such strange things—seeing them, I mean! I am sure it was a vision! Give me your hand, Queenie."

"Only be quick about it, Sibyl!" she said playfully.

Nathalie peered earnestly into the white palm which Elizabeth extended.

"You will have great suffering," she said slowly. "I see the lines—here and here—ah, poor Queenie! O I had forgotten — my presentiment! I hope the trouble will not come through me! Go away—go away—do not ever come near me again!"

She flung Elizabeth's hand from her and started to her feet. She had grown very pale, and her sensitive features worked painfully.

"How childish you are!" Miss Crauford exclaimed, with a certain compassionate scorn in her voice.

"It is not childish! I dreamed about it last night—I remember now! I wish I had never seen you—never!"

Elizabeth could not decide whether the girl was fond of melo-drama, or had read doubtful novels until her brain was a little disturbed. Still Nathalie's character presented a study so new to her limited experience, that she felt wonderfully attracted even by her follies.

"Suppose we go in," she observed, in a matter-of-fact tone; "that will be more sensible than trying to frighten ourselves with fanciful ideas and superstitions."

"You reject my warning—you refuse to

believe!" cried Nathalie. "So much the worse for both—so much the worse!"

Her face darkened; she stood staring straight before her, trembling, shuddering, as if some weird phantasmagora unfolded itself to her gaze.

"Nathalie!" exclaimed Miss Crauford, a little alarmed.

The girl sank back on the bench, and covered her face with her hands, shivering and gasping still. Presently she began to laugh in a rather hysterical fashion.

"It is gone!" she said, looking up again. "I do not know what I saw—something dreadful—but it is gone. Blanche always vowed I was a medium or a mesmerist: I am very odd, I know. Do not mind—let us talk of other things."

"I do not mind in the least," retorted Elizabeth, determined to be severely practical, by way of bringing the other out of these heroics.

"You laugh—you jest!" cried Nathalie, in an irritated voice. "But let the matter go. I will do you no harm—I am determined that I will not." Then, after an instant, she added in a complacent tone,—"But I suppose I shall be a very wicked woman all the same—O, very wicked."

"I never heard a girl talk such nonsense in my life," returned Miss Crauford, horrified

in earnest now. "You will end in a lunatic asylum if you do not stop living dramatics and a hash of sentiment and transcendentalism."

"Ah, I have read Kant," exclaimed Nathalie. "I have read Comte too. I am a Socialist—O, a Socialist *acharné!* My first book will be a Socialistic romance; my second, Blanche's biography; my third—"

Elizabeth was laughing so heartily by this time, that Nathalie left her third work unnamed, and joined in the merriment with childish glee.

"It is true though," she persisted. "You think I am a goose; but I shall write books—many of them."

"Oh, your being a goose would not prevent that," interrupted Miss Crauford in sarcastic parenthesis.

"But let me tell you about my third novel."

"No; those two are quite enough. The idea of Mademoiselle Blanche's biography is overpowering."

"You do not appreciate me, Elizabeth!" sighed Nathalie, with a resignation that was exceedingly comical.

"You must pity my inability," laughed Miss Crauford.

But further words were checked by loud repetitions of Nathalie's name.

"It is Susanne," said the girl, starting up.

"And Monsieur La Tour," added Elizabeth. "What can be the matter?"

Both were frightened, and hurried toward the chalet from whence the summons proceeded. Nathalie flew on into the house; Elizabeth found her father rubbing his left arm, regarding the chess-table which had been upset, and looking at once alarmed and indignant. He could give slight explanation. They had reached the most exciting point of their game; suddenly Monsieur had observed that Madame L'Estrange was coming out on the gallery. Mr. Crauford turned to look—heard a dreadful shriek—saw a female figure totter back. Monsieur had knocked the table over, and hurt Mr. Crauford's neuralgic arm. That crazy old servant had rushed out screaming—Monsieur had screamed, and that was all Mr. Crauford could tell, only that he was much offended by the whole performance. If Madame L'Estrange wished to faint, she ought to choose her seasons better, and not interrupt his game of chess, and cause him to be deafened by an insane noise, not to mention the serious injury to his arm. It was very inconsiderate, to say the least, and disgustingly French.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED DELAY.

THE next days were very pleasant ones at La Maladèyre. Such excursions as could be made in carriages were not objected to either by Mr. Crauford or Monsieur, and Nathalie was kept in high spirits by the unusual excitement.

The Frenchman wished to present his old acquaintance to Madame, but Madame put him off each morning with new excuses, and he at last settled down upon the conviction that it was a pain to her to see strangers now she had lost the beauty and gaiety which she never ceased lamenting even in the midst of her loudest renunciation of the vanities of this mundane sphere. Neither Mr. Crauford nor Elizabeth perceived anything surprising in Madame's refusal; indeed, it was only a delay always—a pleasure deferred. She was constantly hoping to be well enough to receive Monsieur La Tour's friend, and he and Nathalie were daily the bearers of elaborately civil messages.

both to father and daughter. In truth, poor Madame was almost wholly confined to her rooms. The motion of a carriage was insupportable—a Bath-chair her detestation. Once in a while, she could walk about the lawn supported by her future son-in-law and Susanne; but delicacy kept the Craufords from intruding at such times.

Elizabeth was at length permitted to see her. Madame was feeling unusually strong one afternoon, had caused herself to be arrayed in a becoming toilette, and hearing from Susanne that Miss Crauford was in the *salon* with Nathalie, she sent for them both to her own parlour at the back of the chalet.

It was a spectacle Elizabeth did not soon forget. She wondered that Nathalie and Monsieur could become enough accustomed to it not to mind. Madame sat up among her bright draperies to receive the young American, her grizzled hair carefully dressed, her attitude theatrically graceful, pouring out a torrent of pretty speeches, playing with the rings that decorated her bony fingers, smiling, nodding, talking trivialities one instant and quoting scraps from doleful sermons the next. Altogether she was such a bundle of awful contrasts and incongruities that Elizabeth felt as if she

were undergoing an interview with a skeleton galvanized into a spasmodic semblance of life, rendered more painful by the effort to hide its ghastliness under paint and fanciful decorations.

The curtains were drawn, and the room so dark that, entering from the brightness of the sunny gallery, Elizabeth could at first distinguish nothing whatever.

"Why, mamma," called Nathalie impatiently, "we shall break our necks—it is a dungeon! Why has that foolish Susanne shut you up like this? Where are you, Susanne?"

"Of course it is the fault of Susanne—blame her; everything is always the fault of Susanne," grumbled that worthy female from her corner, for Susanne had no idea of obeying the advice of St. Peter's, which urges us to suffer wrong in silence.

"*Chut!*" said Madame. "Our visitor will think she has got into a madhouse instead of a dull invalid room. Come here, Nathalie, and bring Mademoiselle. This is a great, great pleasure—"

"Now, mamma," interrupted Nathalie, "do not talk about seeing her, because it is utterly impossible to see anybody in this gloom."

But as Elizabeth's eyes became accustomed to

the obscurity, she could perceive the emaciated shape propped up among the pillows, and was almost startled for an instant. Somehow in the shadows, Madame with her rouge, her scarlet shawls and her skeleton head, was more appalling than she would have been in the broad light of day. Nathalie, perhaps, noticed this too; she pushed back one of the curtains in spite of a rapid expostulation from her mother.

"At least Mademoiselle will not think we have designs on her life," she said. "Besides, that was an awful light, or darkness rather; it made us all look as if we had been dead a week."

"Be still, child, be still," cried Madame. "Do not use such dreadful language."

By this time Elizabeth had reached the sofa. Madame was extending that bony hand which it required an effort to touch, and Madame's great sunken eyes were looking curiously at her; uncomfortable eyes to have fixed upon one, their fire seemed so out of keeping with the thin ghastly face.

"Dear Mademoiselle, it is so good of you to come to me—so very good," Madame said over and over, still retaining her hand, and glaring at her with that attempt at a smile which was more like a spasm than anything

else. "I love the Americans—they have always been a mania of mine: is it not so, Nathalie, my child?"

"I cannot tell, mamma; I have not known you all your life," returned Nathalie, who was in one of her impassible moods.

"She is half-American, that bad girl," laughed Madame, "though I am sure her naughtiness is entirely French. But you are standing, dear Mademoiselle. I entreat you not to stand —I implore!"

Madame was as earnest and beseeching as if she had been begging her visitor to step out of the fire or away from a precipice, but Elizabeth was accustomed to these little exaggerations of tone and words among the Gallic race.

Susanne sat upright in her corner, knitting as if her daily bread depended upon her industry, for Susanne was in an ill humour to-day, and at such times always knitted violently. Nathalie leaned on the window-sill, and peered out between the half-closed shutters, and wished the world would come to an end—for no particular reason that she knew; but Nathalie's spirits went up and down as irregularly and irrationally as a barometer that is out of order. Elizabeth remained by the sofa, and endured as best she might the feverish glare of Madame's

eyes, and followed as well as she could the rapid changes of Madame's conversation.

"You cannot think how you remind me of—"

Madame uttered this beginning in the midst of talk about Nathalie's marriage, and checked herself as abruptly as she had commenced.

"Of whom does she remind you, mamma?" asked Nathalie, who had looked back just in time to catch the broken sentence.

"I cannot tell—you know it always tires me to think," returned Madame, peevishly. She resumed the explanation of Nathalie's prospects, and Nathalie took refuge in the window again.

"It is bad enough to be married," she thought, "without living it all over forty times each day in advance."

Madame asked Elizabeth a great many questions—about her age, her life, her father; but Madame's tact caused them to sound like inquiries dictated by profound interest and budding affection instead of vulgar curiosity.

"You have been so kind to my spoiled infant yonder, and she has talked of you so much, that I seem to know you well already," said Madame. "You see I find I have grown fond of you in advance."

Elizabeth turned her eyes away to avoid the

spasmodic smile, and thanked Madame for her graciousness.

"Finding Mademoiselle Nathalie here has been a great pleasure to me," said she.

"You are good to say so, adorable!" cried Madame. "Nathalie is a dear creature, but so spoiled—a child—a baby! She has lived all her life in a convent, and knows no more of the real world than an infant."

From the corner where Susanne sat knitting like a grim representation of Industry, came a low, sardonic chuckle.

"Are you coughing—have you taken cold, Susanne?" demanded Madame, in a voice of awful politeness and interest.

"I choked—I think I swallowed a bit of yarn," replied Susanne unhesitatingly and very crossly.

"Susanne is laughing at the idea of my innocence and ignorance—I don't wonder," observed Nathalie, putting her head into the room again.

"Fie, for shame, beloved!" exclaimed Madame anxiously. "What will Mees Crauford think?" Madame spoke in French, but she thought that "Mees" was a neat bit of English —it was her only one.

"She knows me pretty well by this time,"

laughed Nathalie. "Besides, Susanne cannot deny that was what she laughed at."

"I said I choked, Mademoiselle," retorted Susanne stoutly.

"I know you *said* so!"

"And I never tell lies," added Susanne. "I beg that Mademoiselle will not quarrel with me; I am busy."

"Very well," said Nathalie, "I only wanted to settle the question of my babyish innocence."

"A mere baby!" repeated Madame.

Once more a bit of yarn got in Susanne's throat, else she chuckled.

"Susanne," said her mistress, "you have a cold assuredly; I shall give you some of those drops."

Susanne rose, made a neat roll of her knitting, and laid it on a table.

"Farewell, Madame and Mesdemoiselles," said she.

"Where go you?" demanded Madame.

"To drown myself," quoth Susanne calmly. "I told Madame that if she ever again insisted on my taking those drops, I should drown myself—the time has come."

"Go get us some of mamma's curaçoa instead," said Nathalie. "You like curaçoa,

Elizabeth? I am a baby, but I would intoxicate myself with it every day if mamma gave me the opportunity."

First Madame laughed at all the nonsense; then a pain seized her, and she grew grave.

"I am a dying woman, Mees Crauford!" she exclaimed, so suddenly, and with such despairing emphasis, that Elizabeth's first thought was some vague one of rushing for the doctor. "I have done with the world, I ought not even to laugh! I try to make my salvation; I said at least fifteen Hail Maries last night each time I woke. Ah, it is dreary work making one's salvation; but you know nothing about that yet—you are young and strong!"

She looked at Elizabeth with an envious glare in her eyes—she often looked at Nathalie like that. There were moments when it was not easy for Madame to avoid hating anybody who still retained those blessings she had lost, health and youth.

"They ought not to be severe on me, they ought not," she muttered. "I try so hard—Monsieur le Curé says I try."

"Taste of the curaçoa, mamma," urged Nathalie, bringing her a tiny glass of the grateful cordial. "Is it not good, Elizabeth?

Monsieur La Tour gets it for mamma; he is useful in his way, is Monsieur."

"He is an angel!" exclaimed Madame, with as much energy as if no thought of purgatorial pains had ever tormented her. "Mees Crauford, is not this child a fortunate one?"

"I like Monsieur La Tour exceedingly," Elizabeth replied. "He is so kind and gentle, it would be impossible not to like him."

"You hear, little difficult?" cried Madame.

"Yes, mamma, I hear," returned Nathalie, sipping her curaçoa contentedly. "But just ask Mademoiselle how she would like to marry this epitome of all the virtues."

"Mademoiselle could have no thought of the kind in regard to a man who is affianced," said Madame with dignity.

"That comes of my being a baby—you see I know no better," observed Nathalie.

"You are incorrigible!" laughed her mother. "Where is Susanne?"

"Drinking curaçoa behind the dining-room door," replied Nathalie promptly.

Susanne put in her head with an indignant squeak.

"I never so much as smelled of the cork," cried she, wiping her lips as she spoke. "I know I shall drown myself one day. I cannot

bear such constant injustice from Mademoiselle."

"I shall never try that mode when my time for suicide arrives," said Nathalie. "Which way should you choose, Elizabeth? Now, Blanche always declared—"

"Do not talk of such horrid things," moaned Madame. "I do not know what possesses you and Susanne to-day! The doctor says I am to have cheerful conversation."

It seemed to both her daughter and servant that Miss Crauford's visit made Madame unusually nervous and excitable; still she would not let the young lady go.

"It is so great a pleasure to me to see you," she said several times, and always Elizabeth fancied that Madame looked as if she would have liked to bite her. "One evening, perhaps, I shall be well enough to receive you all—Monsieur Crauford likewise. I think I am stronger than last week. Do you not think I am stronger, Susanne?"

"Not a doubt of it," Susanne replied to the inquiry uttered with piteous eagerness. "Madame is very much stronger; I said so only yesterday."

Nathalie sat down by the sofa, and passed her arm about her mother. There was more

tenderness in face and gesture than Elizabeth had yet seen her exhibit.

"I have not been a bad parent to you; I have not," cried Madame.

"No, no, a dear little mamma—there, there!" replied Nathalie, stroking her hair, as one might endeavour to quiet a child.

The little scene touched Elizabeth, but it only lasted a moment. Madame gave one or two dry sobs; an expression made up of terror and remorse crossed her face; then she was first to get away from the softened mood.

"We are wearying Mademoiselle," she said.

"You cannot think that," Elizabeth replied earnestly, and Madame could see that the sympathetic tears had gathered in her eyes.

Madame looked touched, then irritated; but she was altogether so odd and changeable, that Elizabeth would not have been surprised at any vagary.

"Mademoiselle has a tender heart," she sneered. Nathalie raised her head at the altered tone. Madame added, with sudden sweetness, "Love our new friend well, Nathalie; hers is a rare nature."

Nathalie turned and gave Elizabeth a laughing embrace, glad to escape from the seriousness which had oppressed her for a little. There

was a strange light in Madame's eyes as she watched the two; then as quickly she made a sign of the cross. Madame knew she had been thinking wicked things, and she was too near death to allow herself that privilege.

"Monsieur le Curé is coming up the road," called Susanne from the dining-room.

"Ah, put away the curaçoa, and give me the Offerings of St. Joseph," cried Madame to her daughter.

"But the Curé likes curaçoa," said Nathalie, "and he admitted the last time he was here that he thought St. Joseph's meditations very gloomy ones."

"So he did," assented Madame, relieved; then in a changed voice—"But no matter! It is the Curé's business to console me; I need consolation! Give me St. Joseph! He shall have no curaçoa unless he consoles me—not a drop."

"I am going out to walk with Miss Crauford," said Nathalie.

"Yes—go," said Madame. "Adieu, dear Mees, thanks a thousand times for this visit! Ah, you are like—"

She had taken Elizabeth's hand; she dropped it suddenly with a glance of aversion.

"Like whom, mamma?" persisted Nathalie.

"I cannot remember—I forget everything," replied Madame querulously. Do not tease me, child! Adieu, dear Mees; you are an angel of goodness, I am sure. Ah, I am a miserable woman; broken down, old, dying! Where is Monsieur le Curé? Why does he not come to console me? That is his business. I gave a hundred francs to his new church, and I am poor; if he does not do his duty, it is he who will go to purgatory. Susanne, Susanne, take away this red shawl, and bring me the blue one. Monsieur le Curé likes blue. Quick! —how slow you are!"

The two girls passed out through the dining-room, and went down the flight of stairs which was the usual mode of egress from this part of the chalet. They met the Curé panting up the steep staircase, a jolly, fat man, who ought to have made a very comfortable and indulgent confessor. He stopped to pay them both a quantity of florid compliments, and to inquire after Mr. Crauford and Monsieur La Tour, who were having a quiet game of chess in the villa.

"A pair of rosebuds!" cried the Curé, before his question could be answered.

"Elizabeth's papa and Monsieur La Tour?" asked Nathalie saucily.

"You are a little witch," said the Curé,

beaming. "I go to see the dear mamma; is she tolerably comfortable to-day?"

"Oh, yes; but please persuade her not to be doleful," sighed Nathalie. "She does nothing but repent, and I am sure she is very good! If you console her a great deal she will give you some curaçoa—I am certain she will; and it is very nice too."

The Curé laughed heartily, and went his way.

"Well, well," he thought, "it would be pleasanter if one's duty lay more among the young and happy than the dying; but I hope they set it all right for us somewhere: I trust they do."

The Curé stopped on the balcony, took a pinch of snuff, and glanced up at the sky. He was a large-hearted, easy-going man, and liked to keep his theology as mild as his conscience would permit. I am afraid the Curé would have abolished purgatory altogether, if it had been in his power, and made everybody happy in this world and the next. He was careful, however, to guard such unorthodox fancies in the secrecy of his soul, and was sometimes shocked at his own wickedness in indulging in wishes of that nature.

His visit cheered Madame, but in spite of

it she woke in the middle of the night from a bad dream, and was very ill. She wanted the Curé and doctor sent for at once, convinced that both body and soul were in a bad way; but Susanne paid no attention, aware that neither authority could be of the least use. She was prepared with the necessary remedies for those crises, and did not even disturb Nathalie, certain the girl would only terrify her mother by her fright.

Frictions with liniment, and repeated doses of the drops and curaçoa, at last produced their effect.

"It is over for this time," Madame said wearily. "I do not seem to get any weaker. I should think I may last a long time yet."

"There is no doubt of it, I believe," returned Susanne, rather grimly. It was this power of endurance, this inability on the part of Madame's physical frame to wear out, which aggravated the old woman: she thought people ought to die or get well.

"*Eh bien*," thought the Breton, when her mistress at last fell asleep from sheer exhaustion; "if all this does not count in my favour in this world and the next, Monsieur La Tour is a brute, and the blessed saints are no better!"

It was only three or four days later that

Madame and her proposed son-in-law received a severe shock. Monsieur appeared one morning at the chalet earlier than his wont. Elizabeth chanced to be in the grounds as he drove up, and perceived that he looked sorely disturbed and annoyed, though he tripped down from the carriage with his usual alertness, and treated her to his customary eloquent and elaborate greetings. Monsieur always reminded Elizabeth of a cross between a legal gentleman and an old beau of the *ancien régime*, with a plain wig in place of a powdered one. But though one might smile at his quaint courtesies, Monsieur was never ridiculous, and Elizabeth respected him highly.

It was not very long before Nathalie came flying out of the chalet, and joined Elizabeth as she walked down the path towards the lake. Nathalie's eyes were dancing, and her face lighted up with animation and excitement.

"I saw you from the window," said she. "I am out of breath. I ran away fast, fast, for fear mamma should stop me! What do you think has happened?"

"I have not the slightest idea. Get back your breath and tell me," replied Elizabeth tranquilly.

"Figure to yourself, my dear—it will not

be soon — it is put off—unavoidably put off!"

"It? What?"

"I am to have a whole month, perhaps six weeks," continued Nathalie in triumph. "Do you not understand? The marriage, of course. Fancy, only fancy it!"

They had reached the poplar tree by this time. Elizabeth sat down on the bench which encircled it, and looked grave and reproachful.

"Monsieur is obliged to go into Belgium," pursued Nathalie, on whom the glance was utterly wasted. "A relative of his is dying—a horrible old maid, who hated everybody and whom everybody hated. I am sure if she had lived she would have made us a visit, and I never could have borne that."

"Your sympathy must be a sweet and soothing thing to Monsieur La Tour," observed Elizabeth sarcastically.

"O I do not think he wants sympathy on account of that dreadful old woman; but he has to go away. She wants him, and she has money; it is his by right, but she has harpies of relations on her mother's side who might steal it."

"I think he would go in any case if she wished it," Elizabeth said.

"O I dare say; but it would be silly! She lives near Brussels. He must go at once, so there is no time for the marriage; indeed, it would not be decent under the circumstances, and so I said; neither he nor mamma could deny it."

"O no! Your regard for the proprieties is most edifying!"

"You are vexed; you sneer! But I shall have at least a month—more, probably. Only think of it, my beautiful!"

"Suppose he saw you at this moment, and heard you!"

"I cannot help it! I said several decorous things; then I ran away for fear I should laugh. It was so funny to see mamma's face and his, and they both wept a little. I had my handkerchief at my eyes. I was supposed to weep also."

"I think you are very ungrateful to be glad," returned Elizabeth. "I saw Monsieur when he drove up; he looked distressed and troubled."

"No doubt, it was his duty; he could do no less," pronounced Nathalie complacently. "But do not scold. What walks we will have! what donkey rides! O my dear, remember I shall have the bliss of Monsieur's society all

my life—all his life. I mean—while I shall only have you for a few weeks. Kiss me this instant, and look pleased: at least you need not kiss me. There is always something so tame about one's embracing mother: but say you are glad."

"Personally, yes: but that is selfish, and I am sorry for poor Monsieur," said Elizabeth.

"Well, I do not know," observed Nathalie meditatively. "I have no idea that he is to be excommunicated, if he could only think so: it is a reprieve. My dear Monsieur La Tour does not seem to me eminently fitted for a wife-beater: and I do assure you, in confidence, that I fear he is undertaking a whole menagerie."

"And I think all this talk about yourself is nonsense," said Elizabeth. "But if it were not, I fancy you will find Monsieur La Tour a much more determined man than you suppose him."

"Then we shall quarrel horribly. At least that will afford a little variety," returned Nathalie, yawning. "Well, I must go back now. I only ran out to tell you while he and mamma were off the first edge of their despair. See, I shall look lamentably grieved. Will not this answer?"

She drew her face down in such a caricatured assumption of melancholy that Elizabeth could

not help laughing, though, when Nathalie danced off, she was obliged to think, as she had so often done since their first meeting, that there was much to disapprove of in the girl. But severe as Elizabeth was inclined to be in her judgments, somehow she pitied Nathalie more than she blamed her. What could be expected of any creature with a mother like Madame? And Elizabeth shuddered with abhorrence and disgust. Then she felt heartily contrite; but be as sorry as she would for the physical sufferings, there was something loathsome to her in the remembrance of that skeleton face, with its rouged spots and the frizzed curls adding to its ghastliness.

There was not much time for Madame and Monsieur to yield to their anguish, for it was necessary that he should set out the next morning on his journey. Indeed, after her first paroxysm of distress, Madame remembered that the death of this relative would give a sensible increase to Monsieur's fortune, and she was not sufficiently weaned from this world and its vanities to despise that. She sighed to think that it was not likely she could live long enough to have much enjoyment of the money, and she felt a fierce resentment rise in her soul as she glanced at Monsieur, so upright, so

strong, with such hues of health on his cheery face. He was older than she; what business had he to look so well and seem likely to live for the next twenty years to enjoy his fortune? Then she waxed penitent, and tried to think that Paradise must be a pleasant place—perhaps even pleasanter than Paris! But then Madame knew Paris, and she was not acquainted with the other blessed abode. Ah! why could she not be allowed to seek the one she liked! It was all very well for people to go to Heaven who were not contented here; but, for Madame's part, give her decent health and enough money, and she would not grumble at being forgotten by death, even though her youth, her beloved youth, was gone for ever.

Of course Monsieur spent the afternoon and evening with his betrothed, and Nathalie encouraged herself to win Elizabeth's admiration for her discreet behaviour, by remembering that she would have the next day and many next days free from Monsieur's society. As Madame's invalid state did not permit of late dinners, Monsieur and Nathalie dined at the villa, by Mr. Crauford's invitation. They had a very pleasant meal; Monsieur tried his best to be cheerful, though it touched Elizabeth to see how his mouth would quiver and his eyes

turn pathetically upon Nathalie, as the girl laughed and chattered, champagne glass in hand; for Nathalie had a great appreciation of good things in the way of table enjoyments.

Then Nathalie and Monsieur had to return to Madame, and Elizabeth spent the evening playing chess—which she hated—with her father, and wondering how Nathalie could prove so utterly regardless of the great love lavished upon her.

"It is so beautiful to be loved," thought Elizabeth. "A woman ought to be proud of a good man's affection; and the contentment and rest would be so much sweeter than all that excitement and passion novels are so full of."

Which wisdom showed the complete ignorance wherein Miss Crauford had lived, so far as emotions of that nature were concerned.

Madame dreaded greatly this delay. She was morbidly anxious for the marriage to take place; but to dwell upon the money Monsieur was going to claim did soothe her somewhat at the parting, and afterwards even more.

Still it was a miserable business, viewed in its best light, and Madame and Monsieur were very wretched. Nathalie remained as lachrymose as she could, though her gravity was often

sorely tried to see how odd her mother looked as her tears spotted her paint, and what grimaces Monsieur made in his efforts not to weep also. Besides, Susanne, not to be deceived by any shallow pretence, passed in and out of the room on frequent errands, and upon each occasion favoured Nathalie with glances of such stern reproof, such scornful consciousness of the girl's hypocrisy, that Nathalie would have given the world for somebody to enjoy the whole comedy with her.

CHAPTER VII.

"LA CHAUDERON."

ALMOST four weeks went by, and very pleasant ones they were to Elizabeth. Mr. Crauford was in an uncommonly placid mood, the duration of which was of such length that it astonished his daughter, though she did not put the matter in this brutal fashion. It was a bettering of papa's health, longer freedom than usual from nervous pains, and similar reasons, or well-sounding names rather, such as Elizabeth always insisted on finding for her parent's caprices. He even worried himself and her less than ordinary by his indecision upon affairs in general, great or small, from the important doubt if coffee or chocolate would best agree with his "system" of a morning, up to debates whether the newly invested funds should be drawn out and established in some other quarter.

He discovered two or three acquaintances staying at Vevay, several more up at the hotel

"Lord Byron," between the Castle of Chillon and Villeneuve. He could give occasional dinners, and indulge now and then in a game of whist in the evening. He had a poem in his mind—not that he was writing one, nor ever would or could—but he believed each night that he should commence so doing the next day. He not infrequently stumbled on a few rhymes, which he repeated to Elizabeth or his guests as "extracts from the work that would be *the* labour of his life," with an emphasis on the article as if he had been from early youth busy with grand mental tasks whereof this was to prove the crowning glory.

The weather was gorgeous. The beautiful region grew more and more into Elizabeth's heart. She had admired it at first, but she learned to love it.

Mr. Crauford sometimes recited little poetical quotations about scenery. He offered these with such a conscious manner, such an air of condescension and proprietorship, that few people were bold enough to suppose them not original, even if an effort of memory could have traced them to their source. But in spite of these proofs of genius and taste for the beautiful, Mr. Crauford had slight fancy for going in search of it, especially when the road

led up steep hills. In consequence, Elizabeth and Nathalie made a great many excursions together, guarded by Gervais or Margot, sometimes, to the latter's contentment, by the pair in company. And there were such quantities of lovely places to visit, it is a shame that the attempt to describe them would only sound like a page torn out of a guide-book. The old château of Blonay was within walking distance, so were numerous picturesque hamlets perched on the hill-sides. Then there were jaunts in a stout *char;* climbs up the rocks of Naze, which command a wonderful view of the Savoyard and Bernese Alps and a glimpse of Mont Blanc; a journey to the Col de Jarnin, a wild, frowning pass with the needle-like cliff towering above: everywhere one turned new routes delightful to follow, new scenes more charming than those discovered hitherto.

There was a little boat at the villa landing which Elizabeth could row, and, though Nathalie was at first given to slight fears, she overcame them, and the two were very fond of drifting about the lake on the warm afternoons, when Mr. Crauford did not see fit to grow nervous and keep them at home.

Then, too, Madame was capricious, and not unseldom prohibited Nathalie's seeking her

new favourite. Madame had her days of liking Miss Crauford also, and would even sometimes beg the favour of a visit, but she generally turned sulky or fretful before Elizabeth had been five minutes in the room, and almost forgot her thin varnish of French politeness under the force of some secret irritation. Of course, Miss Crauford bore her moods patiently; she knew how terribly the poor woman suffered. She could not so easily pass over the capriciousness with which Nathalie was treated; she could see that it had a bad effect upon the girl, who certainly possessed faults enough already.

The days flew by. The vintage came and passed. This was a disappointment to both girls. They had looked forward to witnessing a scene at once poetical, picturesque, and bucolic, and had talked in advance of the pretty sight it would be to watch the stalwart youths and sun-browned maidens gather the amber clusters of grapes, poising the rustic baskets on their heads, singing quaint songs in their free, musical young voices.

The reality of which picture was that dirty old men and ancient crones, hideous of aspect, collected the grapes in ugly wooden buckets, crushed the fruit with heavy sticks to make

the buckets hold the more, and after that the masses were put under a huge black *pressoir* to be squeezed, and both men and women were drunk day and night—alas for romance!

Between that cruel disillusion and her mother's increasing fretfulness, Nathalie began to lose patience.

"I wish Monsieur would come back," she said often. "He is little and he is ugly, and he wears a wig, but, at least, he is always good-natured, and mamma is so tiresome with her temper."

"Remember how long she has been ill," Elizabeth said one day when Nathalie had come in to see her, indignant and annoyed.

"My dear, I never attempt to blind myself to facts," returned Nathalie, with a cynicism that was painful. "Illness has nothing to do with the matter. Mamma was always the most tyrannical and capricious woman in the world, and her temper was always fiendish. I recollect that as a child, though I was not much with her, I was in the way."

"Nathalie!"

"I was in the way, I assure you. Did I not just say I never made to myself illusions? She put me in a convent for her own convenience,—she kept me there for the same

reason till I was grown up,—she took me out because it suits her that I should marry."

"Do you not suppose what seemed best for you had something to do with her resolves?" asked Elizabeth.

"I will suppose so if you like. I should have been sent just the same in any case. Now, do not make me out worse than I am. I bear tolerably well with her caprices, you must admit."

"Yes, in general."

"Ah, well, one is not perfect—even mamma, though she is trying to make her salvation."

Nathalie was so accustomed to regard her mother as an invalid, and knew so little of illness, that she was not anxious about her—no proof of hard-heartedness in her case. Indeed, it seemed an even chance whether Madame's strength might not hold out till she had exhausted the patience and health of all surrounding her.

"I do bear with her," pursued Nathalie, "because she is ailing. If she were well, we should have one battle royal that would prove to her I meant to be mistress, and I should probably be forced to box her ears."

"Nathalie!" in a tone of horror.

"I should infallibly and without doubt box

her ears," amended Nathalie, as usual goaded on to fresh extravagancies of language by this note of disapproval. "I boxed Susanne's ears the other day; she thought I was mad, and has been very docile ever since."

"Nathalie!" — disapprobation that was almost disgust now mingling with the horror.

"What will you? I told you long since I was a whole menagerie," returned Nathalie, shrugging her shoulders. She rose and looked at herself in the glass—they were in the salon of the villa—and continued pensively, "I look so sweet and amiable, too,—it is odd! After all, I am not ill-tempered; I mean that I neither scold nor fret—all I want is my own way! I must have that; I was born to have it, I suppose, else the instinct would not be so strong in me."

Elizabeth had learned the uselessness of expostulation or other attempt to set right Nathalie's peculiar ideas.

"Have you had a letter from Monsieur this week?" she asked, by way of changing the conversation.

"Yes, this morning. But, bah! his letters always vex me,—half to mamma, directed to her, read by her first; it is odious! Such a marriage as mine has little enough romance;

they would be wise to leave me at liberty to weave a few shreds about it. But no, they are blind, blind!"

She walked up and down the room, stamped her feet, inveighed against French customs and the peculiar idiocy displayed by her betrothed and her mother; and Elizabeth let her alone, aware by experience that she would soon rave herself into calmness. Presently she sat down again and began to laugh; Elizabeth looked so perfectly unmoved that she could not avoid coming out of her heroics.

"I really believe if you did not act like a wet blanket on me they would drive me into something desperate by their folly," said she.

"Folly which exists in your imagination," returned Elizabeth. "You would like to get up a grief for yourself, and you have no materials. You have told me twenty times you had no objection to marry Monsieur La Tour."

"Just so," said Nathalie; "but sometimes the prosaic look of the whole thing drives me wild."

"Bah! you always want an excitement of some sort."

"So I do. You know me very well; but you like me?"

"O yes, I like you; shall we go out? Papa is busy in his room with letters—he did not want my help, he said; odd, too, now I come to think of it, for I am usually his amanuensis."

"I never mean to be useful," said Nathalie; "it is a mistake! Monsieur La Tour will find that all the sacrifices must come from him."

"What a selfish, petty life you will lead!"

"You think it? Ah, well, at least I shall be helping Monsieur to win the way to Heaven —you know it is sacrifice does it," laughed the incorrigible girl.

Elizabeth went up-stairs to see her father before going out, and found him still occupied. He looked flurried and worried, but, as he declared there was nothing the matter, she concluded that he was only oppressed by a sudden afflatus of his genius. Sometimes, when waiting to be delivered of a few verses, the agonies of labour were extreme. If he had not possessed a dictionary of rhymes to serve as a sort of mental midwife, there is no knowing what misfortune might have happened; even with that aid, the struggles more frequently ended in doleful abortions than any completed effort.

Down by the fountain between the villa and

chalet the girls met Margot, of whom they were in search. They met Susanne too, and Susanne and the Burgundian were both in a towering passion. Susanne had threatened to drown her opponent in the basin, and the two were displaying an invention in the matter of bad names which only French tongues could have shown. A seven-headed monster, and each head that of a donkey, was the mildest term of opprobrium Susanne lavished upon her foe and the Burgundian replied by cruel taunts in regard to her enemy's age. It seemed difficult for either to tell what the quarrel had risen about; but Gervais was standing at a discreet distance, wearing an expression of such modest merit that the young ladies felt certain his fascinations were at the bottom of the disturbance.

Fortunately, both women stood sufficiently in awe of Miss Crauford for her presence to bring the dispute to a close and postpone the proposed drowning of Margot.

"I wish you had stayed in the house," whispered Nathalie; "they would not stop just for me, and I dare say the noise might have amused me. Proof of a vulgar taste, is it not?—but true all the same."

Miss Crauford requested Margot to follow

without delay, and to have the goodness to check her sobs, which had burst forth with appalling vehemence at sight of her mistress.

"It was no fault of mine," she began.

"I have not said that it was," replied Elizabeth.

"She goaded me; she maddened me with her vile language. Mademoiselle must not blame me," cried Susanne.

"I have not told you that I did," returned Miss Crauford. "I have only to say that I would advise you both to end the quarrel at once, and to be careful that I hear of no future one."

They could neither of them have told why they stood in awe of her, since she never scolded, yet they both did. Perhaps it was her very composure which caused them to feel that some awful threat lurked under her cold reproof. Susanne passed meekly into the chalet; Margot dried her eyes in haste, and followed the young ladies without as much as a gurgle in her throat.

"I cannot think how you manage it," sighed Nathalie; "I am so fond of making people do as I say, yet I never succeed half so well as you, who seem to care nothing about it."

They took the hill-road to Clarens, and

walked on past the pretty cemetery which overlooks the village and lake. No more tranquil place of rest could be imagined. Weeping willows drooped over the grassy graves, melancholy cypresses stood up like funeral urns. Strangers from all lands slept there under the blue sky. Beneath them stretched the long, narrow valley, the lake spread out, a sea of molten amber, in the far distance, where sky and water seemed to meet, a golden-pink haze floated like a curtain, fairly dazzling the eyes with its splendour. Vineyards dotted the hill-sides; picturesque villages were scattered here and there, some close to the lake, others clinging to the mountain; beyond was the mighty sweep of snow-crowned cliffs that guard the road toward the Simplon.

The two girls went their way at length, talking more gravely for awhile than they had before done. But Nathalie soon recovered her gay spirits. She gave reminiscences of her convent life, possessing the enviable faculty of making the events and people she described stand out living and real; and her mixture of fun and cynicism was very droll. The pair had few tastes or ideas in common, still they enjoyed each other's society. Both were en-

thusiastic in their way, each secretly contemptuous of her companion's subjects of enthusiasm, but eager to hear about them all the same. Elizabeth Crauford had not lived much with girls of her own age. By nature and habit she was reticent, yet she always found herself talking to Nathalie with a freedom at which she wondered. Perhaps some feeling that the creature needed a missionary to point out the beautiful and true animated Miss Crauford to a certain extent; but, independent of that, there was a charm about Nathalie which she could not resist; she might disapprove, still she loved her.

They went on through Montreux, and turned down the precipitous hill toward Terretêt and the lake, to where the Castle of Chillon rose close to the water's edge. They were fond of going there, though the castle was always a disappointment, in spite of romance and Lord Byron. The exterior looked more like a great whitish-grey farm-house than a château, and the dungeon Nathalie pronounced too dry, and light, and comfortable. But, though Elizabeth did not care about Lord Byron, she liked to dream of Bonnivard and his struggles for freedom; while Nathalie called that view prosaic, and preferred Byron's imaginary hero and the

poet's name cut by his own hand in one of the columns.

At least the château boasted a drawbridge, a turret, some high-walled courts; and there was a dismal den which had been the chamber of an ancient Duke of Savoy, and next it a room, with a single window, giving a lovely view over the lake, where his duchess, perhaps, used to sit centuries ago and look across the waters, and think what a doleful thing was a ducal existence, while her lord snored in the outer apartment after the labours of the chase.

"A duchess who only had one window to her bed-room!" cried Nathalie. "Marrying Monsieur La Tour is not so bad as that."

"You so often find states of life which might be worse, that I wonder you complain so much," said Elizabeth. "Admit once for all that—supposing such a thing possible—and you would be very sorry if your engagement were broken off."

"So I should," said Nathalie. "But, then, I am not satisfied. Ah! if one could only be a duchess now!"

"With a bed-room like this?"

"Nonsense!"

"My dear, we are neither of us very old nor very wise, but we do know, or we ought, that

the woman who has a heart offered her like that of Monsieur La Tour's has won a prize."

"No doubt; but what I want is twenty prizes, not one."

"Well," said Elizabeth, "I only hope Monsieur will make you live in some quiet place where you cannot get into mischief."

"I would get into mischief if he shut me up in a box!" cried Nathalie. "At least one could put an advertisement in the newspapers,—'Wanted, by a handsome young woman, whom an old husband guards like an ogre, a speedy and amusing chance to disgrace herself.' Something of that sort would bring answers."

They left the château, mounted the hill again, and reached the grey stone church—the last building on the mountain road. It hangs suspended midway along a mighty cliff—a frowning mass of rocks towers above—just space for the highway, the church, and a terrace; then the hill sweeps down almost in a precipice toward the lake. A marvellous spot that terrace for watching sunsets and dreaming dreams!

They seated themselves on one of the rustic benches arranged under the low, sturdy trees; and even Nathalie was silent for a time. The bell up in the grey tower was ringing slowly;

the rooks circled about, and answered its chime with their hoarse ejaculations. A bird, perched on a window-sill of the church, sang as if he would sing his very soul out: the breeze stole softly past; the magical view brightened, and grew glorious each instant as the colours of the approaching sunset began to gain strength and brightness. The mountain range that shut in the lake miles and miles below was a long line of rose-coloured flame; the nearer cliffs had their summits bathed in gorgeous tints, while awful shadows began to wrap their sides, and spread far out over the waters, till in the centre of the lake the sunset hues struck broad and full, dazzling the eye with their radiance.

"I like to come here," said that provoking Nathalie suddenly, "because there is occasionally a man to look at me."

There were plenty of people scattered among the different villages, but few whom Nathalie called interesting. There were flocks of heavy Germans who came for the cure, and were to be met on all the roads with *cabas* of grapes, busy devouring their ten pounds per diem. There were quiet English families who could not afford to go anywhere else, and seemed occupied in wearing out their old clothes; one woman in particular appeared in a succession of

faded ball-dresses, whose colours made Nathalie sea-sick,—quantities of bustling Americans, who came because they must rush into every nook and corner,—but genuine young men—handsome, stylish fellows—were so scarce that Nathalie often declared she feared the race must be nearly extinct. She followed up her first remark by a speech of this nature.

"Luckily, the race is nothing to you any longer," said Elizabeth, inclined to be severe at this disturbing of her reverie.

"Is it not?" demanded Nathalie. "Let me get within reach of a dozen or two, and you shall see, and Monsieur La Tour also."

"You might prove less irresistible to them than you fancy," returned Elizabeth; "your vanity is excessive."

Nathalie laughed, not in the least nettled.

"You really do me good, in spite of myself," said she. "I believe I should turn out a very decent woman if I could always have you near me."

Presently along came a troop of Germans, all with noses like sausages, all eating grapes, and making a terrific noise about it. Nathalie vowed that she could not endure their society.

"I should hate a view into heaven in such company," she said, with her usual vehemence.

"We might go on to the village, and back to the Chauderon; we have never been there but once."

In trifles it was easier to yield to Nathalie for the sake of peace, so Miss Crauford complied with her whim.

Back of Montreux is a great chaldron-shaped gap in the mountains, torn out ages ago by some mighty convulsion of Nature. In the centre a white cascade leaps and foams down the rocks—a mad torrent when swollen by spring rains and melting snows, but diminished in volume, lovely rather than grand, at that time of year.

The path by which one descended the cliff was precipitous enough. Margot begged piteously to be left at the top.

"I am afraid," she whimpered; "I dreamed twice last week of breaking my neck by a fall in just such a place."

"Did it hurt?" asked Nathalie.

"Ah! do not laugh, Mademoiselle. I cannot go—I cannot."

"Wait for us here," returned Elizabeth. "No one wishes you to do what frightens you."

As soon as she found herself safe from the expedition, of course the Burgundian pro-

ceeded to find a lie wherewith to cover up her cowardice.

"It is not that I have fear, Mesdemoiselles," she said with dignity, "but I possess an aged mother dependent on my exertions. I have no right to risk a valuable life."

"Only a mother?" asked Nathalie.

"Four little brothers and sisters, one a lame boy, and a brother-in-law who is paralytic," said the Burgundian glibly, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"The lame boy and the paralytic have appeared since the last time she told the story," whispered Nathalie to her friend. "I always thought our Breton the hugest story-teller in the world till I saw your Burgundian."

They left her seated on a flat rock, tranquilly munching a cake, and forgetful already of her suffering family in the pages of a cheap *feuilleton*, fuller of wonderful incidents than any imagination save that of a Frenchman could have conceived.

At the bottom of the immense ravine a rustic bridge spanned the stream, just below the cascade. On the other side a path as arduous and difficult as that by which the two girls had descended led up among higher

cliffs, where dark pine trees cast gloomy shadows about.

The cascade talked so loudly that Nathalie's voice was drowned, and she relinquished in despair any effort to converse, feeling that she rather hated the noisy thing, as she had just been ready to propound some wonderful theory which had struck her, and which she believed startlingly original.

Elizabeth stood on the bridge and enjoyed the lovely scene to her full content for a time. Suddenly it occurred to her strange that Nathalie had left her so long in peace. She looked about; her companion had disappeared. Elizabeth crossed the bridge and gained the opposite bank, caught the flutter of a dress, and heard Nathalie's voice, half in merriment, half terror. That creature could no more keep out of mischief than could a kitten. She had gone down to dip her hands in the water, had slipped on the spray-wet turf, and entangled her skirts about the branch of a fallen tree so that she could not extricate herself.

Elizabeth hastened to her rescue. How it came about neither could ever tell; but after getting Nathalie free, and helping her part way up the bank, Elizabeth slipped and fell,

knocking her head with such force that she lay senseless. Nathalie shrieked, and became utterly helpless and insane at once. Fortunately a gentleman, who had been higher up among the hills, heard and saw what had happened as he came down toward the bridge.

It was the work of only a few minutes for him to raise the prostrate girl, carry her to the bridge, and assure the frightened Nathalie that her friend was not hurt. In spite of Nathalie's alarm, she had eyes to see that he was a tall, fine-looking man, and young,—an artist, too, judging from the sketch-box slung over his shoulder. But the stranger did not notice her,—he was studying the face of the girl he held in his arms. Launce Cromlin was a painter, and this face like the ideal he had been searching for for years. But he had no leisure for such thoughts,—every moment was precious. He had only reached Montreux a few hours before; the long-delayed letters, informing him of old Mr. Vaughan's illness and desire for his immediate return, were awaiting his arrival. There would be no train until towards evening. He had gone up the mountain with his sketch-box to pass the time, had lingered longer than he ought, and was hurrying towards the village, afraid of miss-

ing the train, when stopped by Nathalie's frantic cries.

The fainting girl was not hurt, he was sure of that. He had no time to waste in absurd, romantic fancies.

"She is coming to herself," he said. "Mademoiselle, you will think me a brute; I cannot stop, I must catch the train; I am going to a dying relative. Stay here, and I will send you help; no, better, I'll carry your friend up the hill."

It was not an easy task to carry a well-grown young woman up that ascent, but Cromlin did it. Elizabeth was conscious now, though she dared not stir, for a very prosaic reason, she had turned horribly sick. She could not open her eyes; she knew she was placed on a bench; heard Nathalie's voice, and that of the stranger, but could only cover her face, and whisper to Nathalie to send the man away.

"She is better," Nathalie said. "Thanks, a thousand times. Ah! here is Margot, Mademoiselle Crauford's maid. We shall do very well now. Don't wait, please; you need not send anybody. If you see a carriage, you might order it to wait for us at the turn. We must drive back to the Maladèyre. Thanks, again. Good-bye."

Cromlin would have given a great deal for one more look at that pale, beautiful countenance, but it was carefully hidden. He comprehended that for some reason the ladies were anxious he should take himself off. Indeed, he had not a moment to lose; his best exertions would barely bring him to the station—away down near the lake—in time. A few more hurried words, and off he dashed.

That night as Nathalie sat in her own room, thinking over the incident, she said many times to herself,—

"That is not the man; there will no harm come to her through me where he is concerned. Yet he is to be something to her; such things do not happen for nothing."

The mishap was to be kept a profound secret from Mr. Crauford, lest he should prohibit any future excursions. The girls hired a carriage and drove home, and Elizabeth was quit of her accident with only a headache.

Launce Cromlin had found time to ask questions at the station in regard to the inhabitants of La Maladèyre.

He knew that Robert Crauford was an old friend of his uncle's. Mr. Vaughan had formerly talked much to Launce of Mrs. Crauford, of this very young lady he had just aided,—a

child in those days, never seen by Mr. Vaughan since her babyhood.

And Launce, borne swiftly away through the dusk of evening, was thinking it odd that he should have been thrown momentarily into the presence of this girl, for he had known from his own mother of Mr. Vaughan's youthful love and disappointment.

That face haunted him like the realization of a long-cherished dream; and often during his rapid journey, and the sea voyage which succeeded, he marvelled when and where he should meet it again.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE.

Mr. Crauford had not passed an agreeable night. Having taken very little exercise during the day on account of a fancied *bise*, which he was certain would give him neuralgia, he naturally did not sleep soundly, and was beset by bad dreams. He had no idea that he could blame himself for the restlessness; he regarded it as entirely the result of his delicate health and nervous organization.

Daylight came, and he was disturbed by the groans and expostulations of an unfortunate swine that the farmer and his man were dragging away to sacrifice. The Mosaic outcast did not go forth to martyrdom with any attempt at calmness or dignity. His yells were actually heart-rending. This tumult startled Mr. Crauford from the only peaceful doze he had encountered since going to bed. When the voice of the victim died in the distance, he fell asleep again, and dreamed of

seeing a pig with a night-cap on, who addressed him in the words of the elder Hamlet, "I am thy father's ghost!" Mr. Crauford woke in disgust. Nothing so thoroughly vexed him as to have unromantic dreams. It hurt his vanity to think that even in slumber his poetic nature could be visited by commonplace fancies.

So he rose in a mood to suffer, and to make life uncomfortable to those about, as is the privilege of poets. Elizabeth paid him a visit, and was full of sympathy for his complaints, to which she would have been obliged to listen all day instead of going out on that ramble with Nathalie, had not a fortunate occurrence—whereof she was in ignorance—made her father anxious to be left alone.

The postman brought a letter for Mr. Crauford, an American letter. On opening the envelope, he found the closely-written sheet marked private.

The mystery was quite delightful to him; he fairly forgot the neuralgic pain at the back of his left ear, and the second line he had been vainly seeking as a continuation to what he believed a poem.

The letter, which he read with great interest, —for anything approaching romance was agreeable to Mr. Crauford, as it is to most people,

however stoutly they may deny the charge,—came from Darrell Vaughan. It detailed the facts of his uncle's illness and death, the fortune which had devolved upon himself, and the odd, unbusiness-like codicil appended to the will; I should say, the story of the codicil with a difference. Darrell Vaughan made no mention of Launce Cromlin. The dead man had decreed that his nephew should inherit the additional two hundred and fifty thousand dollars on condition that he succeeded in obtaining Elizabeth Crauford's hand.

"You will see," wrote Darrell, "from the foregoing, why I have asked you to keep this letter a secret for the present. If your daughter knew of this strange codicil, it might either prejudice her against me or cause a certain embarrassment between us. You will perhaps smile at my romantic folly when I tell you that my heart has gone out toward a woman I have never seen. Yet it is true. Before my uncle's death I had been shown by a mutual friend your daughter's portrait and several letters from her. I had contemplated a journey to Europe with but one object—that of seeing her.

"Among my uncle's papers I have found a letter for you, and one also for your daughter. I do not enclose these, because I shall soon hope

to hand them to you personally; and I cannot bear to risk their possible loss by post. Every line penned by that dear hand seems sacred to me.

"There are other trifling details which his letter will explain, and which can wait until I place it in your keeping. I have stated the one fact of importance, that he desires his nephew to have the great happiness, if possible, of winning your daughter.

"Although we have never met, I believe you may know something in regard to me and my brief past, such as it is. I have tried not to waste my youth, have endeavoured to make such talents as I possess useful to my kind. That you could for an instant suppose me unduly influenced by this money part of the question, I feel, from what I know of your character, to be impossible. I am a richer man now than is necessary for the gratification of such quiet tastes as mine. That the romance and uncommonness of the codicil appeal to me, I shall not deny, nor do I believe you will smile at the folly which leads me to fancy my previously seeing the portrait and those letters an omen that my uncle's wish was to be my fate."

There was a good deal more, written in a

manner which appealed powerfully to Mr. Crauford, as the writer of the epistle had been certain it would do. Mr. Crauford was much excited by this news, and in a state of delightful misery. I can think of nothing except this paradox which will exactly express what his feelings were. It was difficult for him to avoid calling his daughter at once and telling her the whole story; yet he enjoyed so thoroughly the importance of his secret that he would not have done this for the world. There mingled, too, other emotions, which touched upon old jealousies and pains. Mr. Vaughan had loved the woman who became Robert Crauford's wife. Mr. Crauford had always been haunted by the idea that pique influenced Laura Marlow in her acceptance of his hand. Still she proved a faithful wife. The one storm which arose and threatened their peace grew out of his faults. That was a period upon which Mr. Crauford did not like to look back. His conscience had grown tender since he became a victim to dyspepsia, and there were certain episodes, before and after his marriage, whereon he never dwelt if he could avoid it. He was never so severe upon the frailties of others as when something chanced to rouse those troublesome recollec-

tions. Perhaps he thought repentance and remorse left him at liberty to judge his neighbours with unsparing rigour. Perhaps in some way it was a relief to inveigh against folly or vice—a proof to his own mind that he abhorred it. I do not mean to say that Mr. Crauford had ever been a very bad man, that is, led a reckless, disreputable life. In the height and heyday of his youth he had not been guilty of any beyond what society terms venial sins, and readily pardons in youths possessing money and position. In fact, his record was quite as clean as that of nine men out of ten—yours, my virtuous clergyman, yours, my decorous judge! It spoke in his favour, that he could still feel remorse when old memories came up. I wish he had not been so severe on other people; but I notice that peculiarity in most persons whose consciences are somewhat uneasy over their own past.

Mr. Crauford was thinking, too, of his wife this morning, and that outbreak on her part, so different from her ordinary cold, quiet manner,—the one cause for an outbreak he had given. He was thinking, also, how he used to be haunted by a fear that she had been fonder of Edgar Vaughan than of him. Their married lives had not brought them into con-

tact with the man, but the idea was ever a sore place in Mr. Crauford's mind. He had fretted and scolded a good deal over trifles all his days; and whenever he worried his wife by so doing, and she grew silent and proud, he used to fancy she was contrasting him in her thoughts with the man whose love she had rejected. This fear did not induce him to cure his faults. He was weak, so he only pitied himself, and felt it hard indeed that any foolish fancy, any girlish predilection, should stand between him and the woman he loved. After awhile the sight of the letter on his table brought him out of his uncomfortable reverie. He wrote to Darrell a pleasant, friendly answer,—he was rather good at epistolary efforts. He should be happy to see Mr. Vaughan and make his acquaintance. In the mean time he agreed with Darrell it was better no communication should prepare Elizabeth for the purpose contained in his coming. Should Mr. Vaughan's business detain him in London as long as he expected, he would overtake them in Pisa. If he could leave sooner, he would find them in Clarens, where they might still remain for several weeks. Darrell's communication came from America; but he was to sail soon, and had given an address in London,

to which he begged Mr. Crauford to write, so that he might have the reply on his arrival.

The answer finished, the hypochondriac decided to go out, feeling quite upset by the unusual excitement of the morning. It occurred to him that, perhaps, the young ladies had not yet departed on their ramble; he would propose joining them in a drive instead. Before this thought struck him, he had sent Gervais to post his letter. Of course, now he forgot that, and summoned Gervais with his customary impatience,—a stranger would have supposed him in danger of a fit, or the house on fire, at least. But Madame Bocher, who replied to the bell and his frantic voice, was too thoroughly Swiss to be hurried or flurried. She reminded him that Gervais was absent. He proceeded to fret a little, in a feeble way. He might fret, for anything Madame cared. Did she know if Miss Crauford and the other young lady had gone yet? Madame knew nothing about the matter, but she wanted to get back to her kitchen; and, as Mr. Crauford said he thought of driving out if they had not departed, she promptly answered that she believed they were still in the chalet, in the little *salon* where Mademoiselle and Elizabeth often sat.

Mr. Crauford tied up his neck,—he could not

move from one room to another without this precaution, bronchitis being one of his pet bugbears, though he never had a sore throat in his life,—and proceeded in search of the pair. The entrance to this *salon* was on the opposite side of the chalet from Madame's apartments, separated from them, as I have said, by a long gallery. Mr. Crauford had been in here on several occasions with Elizabeth. He did not waste time knocking at the outer door of the house, for a vestibule and a dark passage stretched between it and Nathalie's *salon*, and the girls could not have heard him if he had pounded till Doomsday. There was a bell, to be sure, but to ring that was useless too. It rang down in the wine-cellar—what for, nobody save the Swiss architect or a madman could have imagined; but there it was. Susanne had decided it must be to frighten the rats; and when they made too much noise at their revels under the floor, she used to rush out and pull the bell vigorously. Then one could hear the rats scamper in all directions, like ladies caught unprepared to receive visitors, and warned by the tinkle to make their escape.

Mr. Crauford moved forward, stumbled through the dark passage, and reached the *salon*. He rapped, and fancied that he heard

somebody bid him enter. He pushed open the door, and as he did so a voice said,—

"Why did you knock there, Susanne? You startled me."

Mr. Crauford stopped short in considerable embarrassment. The window looking toward the villa had its shutters closed, the other window looked on to the gallery, so that the room was very shadowy indeed. Mr. Crauford descried a figure extended on a sofa; neither his daughter nor Nathalie was visible. He was not quick in thought in general, but he perceived that he must have intruded on Madame L'Estrange. He had not dreamed of disturbing her. Nathalie had often remarked in his presence that her mother detested this room, and never set foot in it. No man's brain was less fertile in expedients than Mr. Crauford's. Whether to stay and apologize or slip silently out he could not decide. But he had little space for meditation; the voice spoke again,—

"What are you doing, Susanne? Help me up—I shall not stay here—I hate this room—why did I come?"

The demon of change, or some other imp equally ill-natured, had prompted Madame's visit this day of all days in the year. She was

especially restless and suffering, had fasted and repeated choice bits from St. Joseph's Offerings until she was utterly miserable. Susanne persuaded her to try the fresh air of the gallery for awhile; and at last she wandered into Nathalie's *salon*, and lay down there for the first time during all these weeks she had lived in the chalet.

Mr. Crauford was exceedingly confused and annoyed at his own blunder. There he stood, helplessly holding the door-knob in his hand. Madame L'Estrange turned her head, and perceived him. She started up in astonishment and nervous terror. The sofa was close to the window; the dim light fell full upon her face; Mr. Crauford saw it distinctly, recognized it too in spite of the alteration and ravages years and illness had worked on its beauty.

He remained speechless, staring at her, and Madame stared at him with her presence of mind as utterly astray as his own. She was dressed in a loose gown of some sombre material made with a capuchon which she had drawn partially over her head; her hair uncurled, her cheeks without paint, her wasted countenance more ghastly than ever from excitement.

"Nina—Madame Tracy!" exclaimed Mr.

Crauford at last, looking like a man who has seen a ghost.

"Yes; Nina," she answered, shivering. "Do not speak that other name."

Then Mr. Crauford's face darkened with sudden anger, and his voice changed to a querulous accent as he cried,—

"What are you doing here?"

Madame sat erect; the fire flashed into her great eyes; the old spirit roused itself, and gave her a momentary strength.

"I suppose I may sit in my own house, Robert Crauford," retorted she. "I think it is for me to ask what you are doing here. I did not send for you, I believe."

"Could I dream of meeting you? Could I suppose they kept you here? No one told me *you* lived with these people—how dared they keep it a secret?" pursued he wrathfully and in stammering haste.

"Where else should I live?" demanded she.

"What are they to you?—what—"

"He was always dull, this Robert Crauford," interrupted she, with a scornful laugh. "Can you not understand? I am Madame L'Estrange."

"It is not your name! What do you mean by going about under an assumed name?" he exclaimed.

"It is my name, and has been for years," replied Madame, growing suddenly composed before his agitation. "If you wish to know how I came by it, I can tell you. Long ago a relative left me some money, and I took his name; I had a right. Left me money; do you hear, Robert Crauford? You never knew nor cared whether I had starved to death or not."

"And you have been living here—you have dared to receive my daughter, to let her know your girl—to—"

He was so angry that he could not continue. He grasped the door for support, and his words died in a gasp.

"Not too fast," cried Madame, in the same sullen, defiant way. "Your daughter sought me, forced herself on me, as you have done, Robert Crauford. As for my girl, she is an angel; say one word against her if you dare!"

She looked such a fury that he was reminded of days and scenes which lay half a life back. He had been afraid of her temper then; he was frightened now in spite of his anger.

"Could I dream of its being you?" said he. "To think of my daughter having set foot in your house!"

"I should not hurt her; I am trying to be good; I have tried so long and so hard,"

whined Madame. Then her voice changed from its lachrymose tone to one of bitter irony. "O these men! They may be as wicked as they please, and set up for saints when they will; but we, poor women, that they fool and ruin, we must not venture to lift our heads from the mud where they have flung us. Bah! you are all alike. I never knew a man who was not a coward—Gerald Tracy was—but you, you are the greatest coward I ever met."

A sharp spasm of pain seized her; she pressed her hand to her side; a hollow cough choked her passionate speech; her strength forsook her, and she leaned back panting for breath. Mr. Crauford was a bad-tempered, unforgiving man, but not inhuman. He saw how ill she was—dying perhaps; his anger yielded a little. This Nina de Favolles had done him a great deal of harm. When he was in Paris, a very young man, she had just reached the acme of her infamous career. She would have ruined him had he not discovered in time that her love was a feint, that as soon as his money failed he would be flung aside and laughed at for his idiocy. He saw no more of her until several years after, when he was in Italy with his wife. Before then, the woman had fascinated the young American, Tracy, and he had actually

married her, knowing nothing of her antecedents. Nathalie was a year old when the truth came out. The unfortunate husband lost his life in a duel with a man as worthless as the woman on whose account he fought. Previous to that, Madame had tried to regain her old ascendancy over Robert Crauford, and failed. By way of having revenge, she wrote him letters, and managed that they should fall into the hands of his wife—letters which revealed the old intimacy, and implied that it had been begun anew.

This was the cause of the outbreak of which I spoke. Crauford had been at length able to convince Laura that, in the present instance, he was blameless, and a peace was patched up, but he knew that, to her dying day, his wife never forgot the knowledge of his past which she had thus gained.

It was not surprising that, of all human beings, he believed this Nina the worst,—that the bare recollection of her after these years could make him shudder. And now actually to be face to face with her again,—to know that his daughter had been in her company, held her hand, was friendly with her child!—this woman, who had almost wrecked his youth, who had nearly lost him the wife he loved.

Certainly one would require to get nearer perfection than humanity often does to support such a catastrophe with any show of patience.

"How can you be so hard on me?" cried Madame. "See what a wreck I am! I have been a changed woman for years. Ask my Curé here, ask my Curé at Dijon. I am dying slowly; I suffer horribly; I am trying to make my salvation. O it is cruel to force yourself on me, and to say wicked things, and to look at me like that!"

"I do not wish to be hard on you; it is not for me to judge," Mr. Crauford said, falteringly. Then he remembered Elizabeth, and his voice grew more stern. "You ought not to have let my daughter come here. I blame you for that."

"It was not for me; I have only seen her a few times. Nathalie is so fond of her," pleaded Madame. "Nathalie is good; she has lived always in a convent. She knows nothing. I changed my name to L'Estrange while she was a little thing. She is to marry Monsieur La Tour."

"Good Lord!" cried Mr. Crauford, struck by a sudden thought. "Does he know—does—"

"O he is a kind man," broke in Madame.

"He is not like you, ready to crush my poor child for her mother's faults. And I was not so bad; there were many worse. I often repented, and once I gave a diamond bracelet on hearing a charity sermon. Let my child alone. I am dying. She will be Madame La Tour, and live a quiet, respected life."

"I have no wish to interfere. I will not have my daughter meet her, that is all," said Mr. Crauford.

"What are you going to do?" cried Madame in terror.

"I shall go away—"

"Ah! I wish you would," interrupted Madame, with a sigh of relief. "I have never felt easy since I heard you were here! I tell you I am trying to make my salvation. I do not like to meet people that remind me of the past. I fast and pray. I try so hard, and I am afraid, afraid!"

She flung up her arms, and her voice rose almost to a shriek. Mr. Crauford only asked to get out of the room; his nerves would not stand any further shocks.

"We can none of us do more than repent," said he, rather clumsily, after searching in vain for some consolatory words.

"No, the Curé says that, and I repent, I do.

Look at me; could I wish to be wicked? My youth is gone, my beauty is gone. O, I was so beautiful! And now I am dying. Why could I not have been left to get very old, and grow accustomed to the idea of the next world? I have money enough to live on, and I could have been quite comfortable. To be sure it is tiresome leading a good life, but one would get used to it. O me, O me!"

"I—I must go," stammered Mr. Crauford.

"Go then," returned Madame violently. "I hate all men. I despise you. I wish I had ruined you outright. What business have you to look well and strong when I am dying?"

Her sudden fury rendered him more nervous, but he could not even then endure hearing that he looked vigorous.

"My health is wretched," he said; "I am a great sufferer."

"You are a hypochondriac. Monsieur La Tour told me," retorted Madame. "You are rich and lazy; so you indulge in little illnesses by way of occupation."

Mr. Crauford felt more convinced than ever that the woman was a fiend. He doubted whether any amount of penitence could help her.

"Are you going?" asked Madame, as he moved toward the door.

"Yes," he answered peevishly. "The idea of my having strayed here!"

"Come back. I'll tell you something first! You are rich, and prosperous, and *well*. Why should you not bear part of the burden that oppresses me? Come back, I say!"

She was so fierce in voice and aspect that he involuntarily yielded to the potent will which had once ruled him so entirely. Madame clutched his arm with her bony fingers, bent toward him till her hot, feverish breath made him shudder. She whispered a few words in his ear, then pushed him roughly away.

"Now go and try *your* hand at repenting!" she exclaimed. "There is something for you to bear as well as me."

Mr. Crauford looked pale and alarmed. Some broken words fell from his lips. First Madame laughed, then a new spasm of physical pain and mental trouble seized her.

"I try to repent, I do try!" she moaned. "I am haunted by ghosts, and all my prayers will not quiet them. But others are more to blame than I. Nobody taught me, nobody told me! My own mother made me what I am —what I was—for I am changed, I am. O,

go away; let me alone. I want the Curé—the doctor; perhaps I am dying already. O my soul! O my poor soul! O, I cannot—"

Mr. Crauford heard Susanne's voice and step on the gallery, and fled.

When Elizabeth came home she found her father in a state of great agitation, and learned that they were to start for Italy the next day. He was obliged at length to tell her that he had seen Madame L'Estrange, and recognized her as a woman whom it was not proper for her to approach.

"You are unjust to visit her faults, whatever they may have been, on Nathalie; she is not to blame," Elizabeth said.

"That woman once came near killing your mother. I cannot tell you the story. The daughter will do you some harm too. I'll not have you near her."

This was all the explanation she could gain. It brought Nathalie's superstitious fancy to Elizabeth's mind; but she was not given to yielding to such follies.

"I am ill—I need change—I insist on starting at once."

Her father took refuge in this plaint, and there was no more to be said.

"It is so sudden, so sudden," sobbed Nathalie

when Elizabeth carried her the news. "And mamma is ill. Ah, me! these have been such happy weeks! Good-bye, darling—good-bye! And I shall never see you again; I am not even to write to you. There is something wrong, I know, by the way your father behaves, and mamma will tell me nothing—only shiver and moan, and rave against you both."

Happy weeks, but they were over.

"At least," thought Nathalie when she had cried herself ill and blind, "at least I can do her no harm. She is gone, and I shall never see her any more; and I loved her so, my Queenie, my beautiful Elizabeth!"

CHAPTER IX.

NATHALIE'S HERO.

NATHALIE spent several very lonely, miserable days after Elizabeth Crauford's hasty departure; and when Nathalie set about being wretched she threw her whole soul into the business, just as she did when pleasure, or any other excitement, actuated her.

She used to sit by the lake and moan that she could not endure this dull existence, and watch the waves and think about suicide, and wonder if Monsieur La Tour would never come and take her away. His image looked absolutely agreeable to her during this dead season; and she wrote him letters, two days in succession, which made his elderly heart thrill with delight. But Monsieur could not leave his post, his relative still lingered and would not hear of his going. Monsieur was in love, but then he was nearly sixty, and at that age Romeo does not wilfully throw away the chance of inheriting a hundred thousand francs. But I do Monsieur

a little injustice: he would have stayed if there had been no money in the question. The old maid begged so piteously for his presence that he could not have found the heart to leave her.

Madame L'Estrange suffered terribly, and her mental anxieties added to her pain. She was haunted by the dread that something would prevent the marriage, and she scolded Nathalie and raved at Susanne, and prayed and begged their pardons, and rushed from one scene to another so rapidly, that even a very good person could not much have blamed the young girl for getting away from her whenever she could, or Susanne for thinking it would be far better if Madame were safe in the next world, and they repeating masses for the repose of her soul.

At least Nathalie had a great deal of time to herself, though it was a sorry business to go wandering about among the haunts where she and Elizabeth had spent so many happy hours. There was an old woman, some relation of the *fermier*, who was glad to earn a few sous by playing sheep-dog for Nathalie's benefit. But Nathalie usually found her some commodious resting-place, and gave her chestnuts and bonbons to eat, while she strolled on alone. The old woman's chatter and slow steps annoyed her, though she hated solitude too. It was Novem-

ber, the nuts were all gathered, many of the trees had lost their leaves,—even the poplars wore a golden crown, which showed that they must soon suffer like their companions,—only the weeping willows were as fresh and luxuriant as ever, and would remain so until the ensuing month. But late in the season as it was, the days were balmy and bright; one could still sit for hours in the open air. The little valley was so sheltered that a nook in the south of Italy would not have been warmer or more sunny. Roses still bloomed in the gardens, and the autumn flowers were out in full beauty. Each day the grand old mountains grew more stately and seemed to increase in height. Often the snow fell at night, and the morning would find them wrapped half-way down their sides in a white mantle that looked as if studded with jewels. Just across the lake, in the Savoy country, the snow sometimes swept to the water's edge, but not a flake fell in the Montreux valley, and fires, except of an evening, were not to be thought of.

The glory of the landscape increased; the sunset tints and changes waxed more gorgeous and wonderful; the soft haze that lay over the scene of an afternoon, and the morning halo on the mountains, were enough to drive one wild

from sheer excess of beauty. But it was a sad time to Nathalie, nor did she love Nature enough to study and admire it alone. She could weave romances, and dream exciting visions, and her fancy and imagination were quick and creative; but she did not like solitude, and would rather have looked out on the Boulevards than down from the heights of the Rhigi.

One day, straight into the midst of her restlessness, her desire for change and excitement, her longing for adventure, her hash of transcendental and socialistic theories, came Darrell Vaughan, and the danger which any one who had studied Nathalie's character must have dreaded rushed upon her without the slightest warning.

This was the way it befell. It chanced that Darrell's banker in Paris was the man who had charge of Madame L'Estrange's matters, and managed for her the bonds and shares which made up her competency. Vaughan had known this banker formerly in America, and he chose to be very civil during the time Darrell was in Paris—a period which the young gentleman lengthened beyond his original intention, as young gentlemen will a stay in the fascinating city.

Vaughan never told his private affairs to

anybody, but mentioning to the banker that he was going to Clarens, that personage ventured to burden him with some documents for Madame L'Estrange, aware that the lady, Frenchwoman like, would be grateful to him for sparing her the expense of the postage on the heavy papers. The banker's daughter had been a companion of Nathalie's at the convent, and showed Vaughan a marvellous photograph of the girl, a picture which brought out her peculiar beauty in its highest perfection. Of Madame L'Estrange the banker only knew that she was the relative and inheritor of an old acquaintance of his; he had assumed the care of her business on that account, never connecting her in any way with the woman whose celebrity had once been something to make sober people shudder.

Before Darrell left Paris he learned that he must go on to Pisa to find the Craufords, but he did not alter his intention of passing by Geneva and Clarens, informing himself that it would not be too late to cross comfortably over the Simplon into Italy, and having no mind to lose a glimpse of the beautiful lake because the people he meant to join had seen fit to change their plans. This was his second visit to Europe, and portions of Switzerland

he knew well, though not the Lake of Geneva region.

So it happened that one bright afternoon Nathalie, sitting to rest on the steps of the chalet after a walk, suddenly became conscious that a very handsome man was standing at a little distance contemplating her. Look and manner were both a compliment, in spite of the rudeness: he seemed to have stopped short to stare literally because he could not help it. He came on now, and Nathalie rose, and he said, in very fair French,—

"I beg a thousand pardons; it is Mademoiselle L'Estrange, I am sure. I am Darrell Vaughan."

"Ah, yes," said Nathalie, with one of her quick, beautiful blushes, that came from excitement, not shyness. "Monsieur Guyon wrote mamma you had been good enough to take charge of a package. She will be so much obliged! Please come in. I shall see if mamma is well enough to thank you. I fear—"

She led him through the dark passage into the little *salon*, and sped off down the gallery to her mother's apartments. Madame would have been glad of the opportunity to see a stranger, but she really was not able. She tried to sit up and think she might be dressed and rouged, but a whole night of pain had left

her so weak and nervous that the bare effort to raise herself was such misery that she began to cry.

"It is always so," she moaned. "I am not allowed the least pleasure—it is hard! I shall not pray to St. Joseph any more; he is no use whatever. I shall tell the Curé to choose me somebody else! *O mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*"

But she sent Nathalie to the guest. Of course Susanne must go to play propriety; and Madame lay back among her pillows and wept, and upbraided St. Joseph for his cruelty in not finding her a brief strength sufficient to receive a male visitor.

"Mamma is so sorry; she is suffering dreadfully to-day. She hopes that you will come soon again," Nathalie said as she appeared anew at the door of the *salon*, with Susanne peeping over her shoulder, that worthy creature as much excited as her betters over the arrival of a handsome gentlemen.

Nathalie spoke in English; she did not expect to say nor hear anything to which Susanne might not listen, still it was a pleasure to speak a language unintelligible to the inquisitive old creature.

"How beautifully you speak English," Vaughan said.

"I ought—I one-half your countrywoman," returned she proudly.

Darrell knew this as well as she. Perhaps there were not three persons in all Switzerland acquainted with the old life and former name of Madame L'Estrange. But Darrell had met at Vevay on the previous night a man who told him enough to make him feel that he could adopt towards the daughter a manner different from what he would have ventured on under other circumstances; and to Nathalie, with her head full of novels, the most exaggerated language, even to an avowal of love during their first interview, would have appeared perfectly natural.

"I am sorry Madame cannot see me," he went on. "Must I go away at once?"

His face grew so eager—his voice so pleading!

"No, no," laughed Nathalie. "One does not have visitors often enough in this dull place to be willing to lose them."

"And I have looked forward for days to this pleasure," he said. "Do you think one must take weeks and weeks to grow acquainted? Mademoiselle, I met your old friend, Marie Guyon; she showed me your picture. I ought not to say so, but it was that picture brought me to Clarens. Are you angry?"

Nathalie was a good deal fluttered, but she enjoyed the scene, and was quite ready to take her part. She answered gaily; she could treat his words as idle *badinage*, but they moved her nevertheless, and he, watching the sensitive face, could see that.

Susanne sat upright in her chair under the shadow of her cap-tower, and stared at the two. She would have given her ears to know what they were talking about, and had three minds to risk a hint to her young lady that she ought to speak French.

They talked of her school-life, of Marie Guyon; they strayed away to other topics; and Vaughan, with his usual quickness to read and understand others, was soon as well able to tell what subjects would interest her, what an impossible hash of sentiment, romance, and false theories there was in her mind, as if he had known her for months.

Nathalie spoke of her newly-acquired friend who had recently gone from her. Did Mr. Vaughan know the Craufords? No, Mr. Vaughan did not. He wondered if the two young women were in correspondence—he must discover. It did not require much artful questioning to draw Nathalie out, for her heart was full of this subject. Mr. Vaughan had been sitting

there some time; they had talked themselves far past the beginning of an acquaintance; conversation that was new to Nathalie, which possessed a keen fascination because it was like the talk in the books Blanche de Savigny's cousin used to procure for them to read.

That dragon and guard of the proprieties and youthful virtue, tightly-laced Susanne, had gone fast asleep in her chair after the fatigues of her mistress's bad night. She sat upright as ever, but her cap-tower had tilted a little to one side, her hands were crossed in her lap, and faint murmurs, like the distant hum of bees, proceeded from her parted lips. Darrell called Nathalie's attention to this. They both laughed, then went out on the gallery, and sat down, perhaps good-naturedly desirous not to disturb the woman's slumbers; for Nathalie mentioned the tiresome watch, and was in a mood to do justice to Susanne's merits in general.

"But you were telling me about this friend of yours," Vaughan said.

"Ah, yes—I loved her so—she is very beautiful, and so wise and good! I tried to hate her for that, but I could not. And I shall not see her any more—we do not even write letters. Is it not sad?"

"But why?"

"Indeed, I do not know—I think Elizabeth does not either. Only just at the last, Mr. Crauford—such a stupid old man, with a horrid nose—found out—well, mamma did not explain, so I could hardly understand. But it seems he and my papa were enemies, and mamma and Mr. Crauford were both shocked to find they had been living near one another, and that their daughters were intimate."

"A little hard for you and Miss—Crauford, is it not?—to visit old quarrels on you," said Darrell.

"Yes; but we shall not see each other any more," sighed Nathalie. "It was best; I know it was," she added, rather to herself than him; for she was thinking of her superstitious presentiment. "It was all so hurried. I scarcely cried till she was gone—she did not, so I kept my tears back. Perhaps her father prejudiced her against us. She was fond of me, but I am sure she always disapproved. Ah, well, she is gone: let us talk of other things, this saddens me."

"I should fancy she must be a rather disagreeable girl—a kind of Minerva and Mentor, and that sort of thing," said Vaughan.

"Ah, you do not know what you are talking about," cried Nathalie impatiently. "I could

tell you so many charming things—but I suppose you do not remain here long?"

"That will depend on you," he replied. "Would you like me to stay?"

"Oh, mamma will be charmed to make your acquaintance."

"Please, don't treat me to a propriety answer," he exclaimed. "Shall I stay?"

She gave him a merry, coquettish glance, but her colour rose under his prolonged gaze. There was a little vase of flowers on the rustic table by her side. She took out a Marguerite, and began picking off leaf after leaf, looking at him from under her downcast lashes, as she said,—

"He shall stay—he shall not—he shall stay—he—O, Mr. Vaughan, the Marguerite says no!" There was real disappointment in her voice; one of her chief weaknesses was a strange faith in omens and superstitious fancies and practices of all sorts.

"You did not do it fairly," said Darrell. "Once you picked off two leaves at the same time."

"Are you sure?" she asked anxiously.

"Quite sure. I shall stay—it is destiny."

He laughed, but he spoke seriously nevertheless. Nathalie's head was in a whirl. As she

had often said to Elizabeth, her theories were immense; but practically she was very ignorant of matters concerning which she thought and talked much. This handsome man, with his soft voice and fascinations of speech, coming so unexpectedly upon her, and finding the way to stir at once her fancy, dazed and bewildered her. Now, for the first time, she remembered Monsieur La Tour. It seemed as if a cold wind blew, without warning, straight over her naked soul. She looked pale, and absolutely frightened.

"O, I forgot!" she sighed.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Monsieur La Tour will be back. Did not Marie tell you?"

"She told me nothing about any such person —who is he?"

"I—I am to marry Monsieur La Tour," she replied.

Vaughan rose quickly. As he turned away, she caught one passionate exclamation from his lips. Presently he came back, and held out his hand.

"Farewell, Mademoiselle L'Estrange," he said, in an odd, choked voice. "You are right —I cannot stay."

Without another word of adieu, he was gone.

"I think," observed Vaughan to his familiar, as took the road back to Vevay, "that I made as neat an ending to the scene as one could wish. What a fascinating creature she is! Hum! Well, *coûte qui coûte*, I shall not go away yet, in spite of Monsieur La Tour and the philosophic Miss Crauford."

Susanne, roused from her slumbers by the hurried passing of the guest through the *salon*, came out on the gallery in search of Nathalie. She began a voluble dissertation upon the gentleman's charms. Nathalie recovered herself enough to rise and go away. She could not endure the sight of a human face or the sound of a human voice. She hurried to her bed-room, locked the door, and there she moaned and wept like a crazy thing. She should never see him any more; he had come and gone like a dream. Was it that he loved her? Ah, he had come because of this; he had loved her from seeing her picture. Now he was gone! She had had one glimpse into heaven, and been cast back upon the bleak rocks! Life had just roused itself, a real life, and been snatched away! Nothing lay before her but misery and anguish, and Monsieur La Tour—how she hated him! The old idea of running off and going on the stage beset her;

the morbid whim for suicide; a score of impossible and absurd ideas flashed up. But it was all reality to her. She suffered; she was half mad with pain. This was the man Fate meant her to love, and he was gone for ever.

Vevay promised to make a pleasant resting-place for a time. Vaughan had met several young Englishmen with card-playing propensities, and passed a jolly evening. That night he ventured on a dose of hasheesh for the first time for weeks, having discovered, from the effect of his later indulgences, that he must beware how he played with the drug. He had missed the poison terribly; for awhile he was much oppressed and upset; no other stimulant took its place. But Vaughan had no intention of becoming a slave to the habit; he meant to keep it, a useful servant when brilliant efforts were needed. So he tried the hasheesh before going to bed, just to be certain that leaving it off for a season was the only thing necessary. His attempt proved perfectly successful. Not only was he treated to a gorgeous vision, but before his faculties escaped control, he found himself able to finish a bit of writing which he had hitherto failed in completing to his satisfaction—a passage in a political article for a review. Vaughan had no mind to be

forgotten by the public, and his speeches and papers similar to the present were not unfrequent.

For reasons which it is not necessary to dwell upon here, he had deferred trying for a re-nomination to Congress. The Administration was one opposed to his politics, yet the causes seized on for opposition by his party in the House and Senate chanced to be matters which he could see would hereafter render those men personally unpopular. If he accepted a nomination and won his seat, it would be impossible to separate himself from their interests. Better to wait. A year from this autumn there would be a Presidential election. The party to which he belonged was sure to bring in its nominee. Then he would go to Congress. During the two closing years of that Presidency he might take a diplomatic appointment, if questions giving promise of an opportunity to distinguish himself should arise with any foreign Government. In the mean time he wrote, as I say, occasional brilliant articles, made effective speeches, and managed to keep himself before the world as a rising man of whom great things were to be expected.

While in London he had been called on to deliver an address at a meeting of some inter-

national society, and survived to perform that most difficult emotional feat—the satisfying of people both in England and America. The London newspapers openly said it was a pity the Washington Cabinet did not send a man like him, young as he was, to represent his country at the Court of St. James's, instead of the dull old fogies usually chosen: and of course the New York journals sneered at the British impertinence. But praised Vaughan immensely.

What Darrell proposed to himself by dawdling in Switzerland he did not take the trouble to think. He knew that Cromlin had gone to California, so he was not pressed for time where his interests in the codicil were concerned. In truth, Vaughan was a more visionary person than he himself realized: capable of very reckless actions, clear-headed, as he could show on occasion. But his bold schemes had hitherto succeeded: he had unbounded faith in his own powers and his luck—the only god he recognized.

I do not mean that he was an atheist. Darrell Vaughan was simply a heathen, and his deity an odd cross between fatality and chance.

He had an ardent craving for great wealth —for acquiring lands upon lands—for the

power that wealth gives. He had not done ill for himself in certain transactions with a set of men at that time all-powerful in the municipal affairs of New York. But Vaughan had been very careful, and kept his record clean: whatever disclosures might in the future menace the clique, he was safe.

He meant now to gain the heritage for which his uncle had given him a chance. Elizabeth Crauford's fortune, added to that and the riches he already possessed, would render him almost a millionaire. The pleasure of thwarting Launce Cromlin counted for something in his plan too. Darrell nurtured no melo-dramatic and mediæval enmity towards his relative; in fact, he rather liked the young fellow personally. But he did hate Launce's honesty and purity of life. Neither quality could be sneered at, for he had to admit that Launce was brave and manly. To surpass his cousin—leave Cromlin's career a poor thing in comparison with his own—had always been one of his strongest determinations. He would have hesitated at no wrong to accomplish this, from trying to make Launce show as a villain to shutting him up in a madhouse, if that had been possible. Best of all would be to see Launce struggle unsuccessfully,

obliged to turn to him for help. He would fling him bounty with great satisfaction. If he ever came to need that he might really hope for Vaughan's regard.

A lover of pleasure, passionate, sensual,—an ugly word to write, but I cannot cure myself of the habit of giving things their true names, —Darrell Vaughan had inward enemies to fight against much more potent than he knew. Indeed, he did not make any fight. All he wanted was to preserve a fair exterior in the world's eyes. He trusted to his own self-control for keeping within bounds, as he trusted to his magnificent *physique* standing the wear and tear to which he exposed it.

The next morning Nathalie set out for a walk, up over the hills toward Chaillet, followed by her old woman. Vaughan joined her: he had been keeping watch over the house, and saw her leave it.

Her smile of recognition, the glad light in her eyes, would have caused him to linger had he been on his way to the church to join the woman he meant to marry, trusting always to his luck that the delay should work no harm to his prospects. The possibility of carrying Nathalie La Tour off, yet not allowing the gratification of his passion to interfere with the

marriage he had sworn to make, occurred to him as he hurried forward to meet the girl.

"I had a hope of seeing you," he said eagerly. "I meant to have gone away this morning, but I could not. Did you think me very rude yesterday?"

"Yes," she answered; "very rude! In France, people do not end a visit so abruptly."

Her smile would have made much harsher words sound pleasant.

"You knew why I went away?" returned he.

She shrugged her shoulders, but face and eyes belied that affectation of carelessness.

"Listen," he said — they were speaking French. "You admitted yesterday that acquaintance, friendship, love even, were not matters of time. I went away so abruptly because the news of your engagement struck my heart like a blow from a sharp knife. I have no right to say this; it is rude, unheard of, what you will—but it is the truth. Will you answer me one question?"

She had turned away her head. She signed him to go on.

"Do you love this Monsieur La Tour?" he asked.

"Mamma chose him for my husband," she

replied, after an instant's hesitation. "You know how such matters are arranged in my country."

"O yes," he cried bitterly; "a bargain, an affair of buying and selling. And you are sold to him like a slave in a market—to this old man! I asked about him last night. You, with your beauty and your genius, are to be bound to him! It is horrible, horrible!"

"I hate it," ejaculated Nathalie, setting her little white teeth hard together. "Every day I have wished myself dead! There, are you answered? I care nothing for forms. It matters not to me that we are what the world would call strangers. I am glad to speak out to some human being."

"Nor are we actually strangers," he said. "Our mutual friend's letter to your mother has told you all about me. But that is of no consequence. In any case, we should have felt at the first glance we knew one another—it was destiny."

He talked, and she listened. It was rubbish, but clothed in such beautiful language that it appealed eloquently to her mind, excited by romances, and ready to grasp at any brilliant sophistry as the real and true.

Soon after she returned to the house. He

followed, and made his call upon Madame L'Estrange. She felt able to receive him to-day, and was charmed with his manners and conversation.

Four days passed, and on each of them Vaughan managed to see Nathalie out of her mother's presence. He was wild about her—ready to believe he had never loved any woman till now; but the idea of sacrificing his future for her, of taking to wife a penniless girl, the daughter of Nina de Favolles—Tracy — L'Estrange — whatever she called herself, never once occurred to him.

Any excitement was always pleasant; any adventure out of the common appealed to his fancy. At least, these days were a new sensation; these *tête montée* conversations with Nathalie were like reading a chapter in an original novel. But the mad idea which had at the first crossed his mind started up as a possibility, and was strong within him when he went out to meet her on this fourth day.

Nathalie's old woman knew that she met Vaughan and walked with him, but she held her peace. Nathalie paid her well for her silence; and as there was no one who tried to buy disclosures, she was not tempted to sell her knowledge.

And this day Vaughan told his love—not that he had hesitated to talk of it before, but now he forced confessions from her lips, and Nathalie felt that she was ready to trust him, stranger as he was. Stranger! she would have laughed at the word. She seemed to have known him for years—all her life. The realization of her wildest dream had come—her visionary hero had taken earthly shape, and stood before her.

They were standing on the hill, back from the road by which the old woman sat as usual, munching chestnuts and calculating what her gains would be at the end of a month.

"Hark!" exclaimed Nathalie. "That was Susanne—surely it was the voice of Susanne."

Vaughan drew her hastily back among the trees, and they stood listening.

"Where is Mademoiselle, I say, you silly old thing?" demanded Susanne's piercing tones.

"I am telling you, or I would if I got a chance," returned the other, raising her cracked voice too. "Mademoiselle has just stepped up the hill for the view. 'Rosine,' she said to me, 'sit you here; the hill is too steep for your old bones.' Always thoughtful is Mademoiselle."

"You are a chattering magpie," interrupted Susanne. "Which hill, when there is one on every side—cabbage?"

"La, la! Just call; she will hear. Why climb when there is no need?"

Then both voices shouted,—

"Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!"

"What is it, Susanne?" called Nathalie.

"Quick, come home, quick! Monsieur La Tour has arrived, and Madame is in hysterics with joy! Come quick, I say."

Susanne had commenced the ascent, there was no time to lose. Nathalie cast one despairing glance at Vaughan and fled.

CHAPTER X.

MILADY'S CELL.

LAUNCE CROMLIN'S voyage was a short one. He reached New York in less than eleven days from the date of his leaving Liverpool.

Those bright, golden days were not unpleasant to that dreaming Launce. The ocean was calm as a lake; there were fine sunsets to watch, agreeable people on board, and Launce was soon a favourite, as he rapidly became with most persons.

He was sorely disturbed by the news of his uncle's failing health, and the long delay of his letters. He had expected to arrive at Montreux weeks before, and so had ordered all his correspondence to be forwarded there from London.

The summons home had been a great happiness. He regretted deeply now that he had allowed pride to prevent his seeking his relative long before. Even yet he was ignorant what had caused the old man's anger or brought

about this new change of feeling. Mr. Vaughan only wrote,—

"I find that I have done you a great wrong, —may you and God forgive me! I am ill—breaking fast, though I may still last a long time. But I want to see you. Will you pardon your hot-headed uncle and come? Explanations I cannot give in a letter. I will not trust my shameful suspicions to paper. Come to me, my dear boy, that I may hear from your own lips that I am pardoned."

Further lines breathing love and tenderness, but not a syllable to throw any light upon the cause of his estrangement.

Launce Cromlin was six-and-twenty,—an enthusiast, an artist who was beginning to win a name in both Europe and America. He had proved that he possessed not only genius but the ability to work patiently and hard, to submit to apprenticeship and routine, as even genius must do if really great results are to be gained. Sir Galahad, his artist associates used to call him; yet among the most reckless there was not one but thoroughly respected and honoured him. A brave, straightforward, noble fellow, manly in every sense of the word; a man whom other men liked too, though he did keep his youth free from the

vices with which, under a score of pretty names, so many of his compeers laid up for themselves a bitter harvest of regret in the future.

Many times during those sunny autumn days, as Launce sat on deck watching the glorious sweep of the mid-ocean waves, and trying with colours and brush to obtain hasty studies which should hereafter be useful for tints and forms, he dreamed of the romantic incident which had marked his day at Montreux. He smiled often at his own folly, and told himself he was as silly as a fellow in a romance, yet the beautiful face of the insensible girl whom he had held in his arms still haunted him. After all it was not surprising, Launce thought. Hers was a countenance to strike any artist. He made a study of the face from memory; it would serve admirably some time. He could imagine a picture that might be very effective. Say a long sweep of sea-beach with the surf tumbling in—great masses of rock like those on the Cornish coast, or at home upon the shore of Maine; a stretch of ocean in the distance, with just those reflections across the waves which he was trying now to catch; upon the sands a woman's figure lying, the face upraised—the face he had painted from recollection. But not a dead

face,—Launce never could think of depicting it as such. The picture should suggest a tragedy, but not death.

So he dreamed and read novels, and made acquaintance with his fellow-voyagers, happier and more light-hearted than ever at the thought of the clearing up of the cloud between himself and his uncle, and the quiet days took their course. Land at last! The great steamer passed up the Narrows, through the beautiful Bay, and the mighty city was reached.

It was still early in the morning when Cromlin found himself once more among the busy streets of his native city. His first business was to rush off to his bankers, in the hope that he might find letters from his uncle. There were none. Then he went to an old friend of his relative, who might have news. The man one wants is never in the way; he whom Launce sought had strayed somewhere into the country. After this there was no step Launce could take to gain any information. He knew that Mr. Vaughan had gone to California years before, and could think of no person with whom the reticent old bachelor would be likely to keep up communication. Who his bankers or lawyers in New York might be, Launce had no idea.

Darrell was undoubtedly in California—his uncle had spoken of expecting him; once there, he would of course remain several months. Still, he sought for him a little; very uselessly, for he knew neither Darrell's friends nor place of abode. Launce had been absent for five years, and even before that he and his cousin had not been intimate. There was no quarrel between them, but their ways of life were different. Launce, too, knew Darrell better than most people. Yet after the renunciation of Launce by their uncle, Darrell had behaved well. He had hunted his cousin up in Europe, professed himself in ignorance of the cause of their uncle's anger, volunteered to do what he could to set matters right; and altogether acted in so frank and sympathetic a manner, that Launce reproached himself for sundry hard thoughts he had indulged toward his relative.

But no tidings had since reached him from Darrell, though Launce had given him a general address at a London banker's. Darrell also knew who his bankers were in New York, which had made Launce hope he might find news from him there.

There was no use in wasting time. He must send a telegram to San Francisco, an-

nouncing his arrival, and must re-commence his journey with the least possible delay. Inquiries brought the information that a steamer was to sail for Panama on the following day. Launce drove down to Bowling Green and secured his passage, principally occupied in execrating the impudent hackman, who proved, like his brethren in general, a disgrace to New York, and in lamenting that the wonderful rail which was to connect the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts was still a hope of the future.

He reached the Everett House again. As he was descending from the carriage he saw a hack laden with luggage pass, and at the window he beheld his cousin's face.

"Darrell!" he called.

The carriage whirled on. He could have sworn that Darrell's eyes met his; it must be that he had not recognized him. Launce offered a preposterous reward to his hackman if he overtook the carriage, sprang back to his seat, and off they dashed. All he gained was a rapid drive down Broadway, a half-hour spent in a press of vehicles at Fulton Street, a quarrel with the hackman, and a narrow escape of arrest by the police as a criminal or madman, from his excitement at the delay.

While eating his dinner that night, Launce glanced idly over the columns of an evening paper, and read Darrell Vaughan's name among the list of the passengers on a steamer which had sailed that day for Liverpool.

Launce's brain was in a whirl. Had Darrell gone in search of him? The possibility of deceit or treachery did not suggest itself to his mind. Such thoughts do not come readily to a man like Cromlin. Could he at that moment have looked into the state-room of the steamer, where his cousin lay very sea-sick and miserable, he would have seen a triumphant smile on his pallid face; and if Vaughan's thoughts could have been made audible to him, they would have run something like this:—

"A narrow thing indeed, by Jove! Ugh, this cursed sickness! He will go straight on to California. A month to go, a month to get back—more at that season—and a hunt for the Craufords, should he push over to Europe. Bah, you are 'played' every way, Master Launce, as usual! Steward, are you never coming with that brandy? Bring a bottle of champagne too."

Long weeks after that night, Mr. Carstoe was sitting one evening in the library of the villa at Moysterville where he and Darrell Vaughan

had held so many friendly chats. The house had not been rented, and, according to an agreement with Vaughan, he made it his head-quarters, as the housekeeper refused to stay and take charge of the lonely place with no better guard for her mature charms than Jack, the lame gardener.

He was awaiting the arrival of his old employer's other nephew. Launce, on his arrival at San Francisco, learned that his uncle had been dead for months, and that his former agent, Mr. Carstoe, was then at Moysterville. Particulars Launce could not gain: he would go on. He telegraphed to Mr. Carstoe that he might be expected. He was broken-hearted at these tidings. It seemed so hard that his uncle should have gone before he could once more hear words of kindness from the lips of the man whom he had loved so well. At least he must have left letters—some explanation of the mystery which had so long separated them. No one so likely to know as this Mr. Carstoe: he would go in search of him. Of the fortune —of his own share therein—he had no time to think; his mind was full of his sad loss, and the bitter disappointment of having arrived too late.

He was worn, tired; another man might have

fancied himself menaced by illness; but Launce, never having been ill in his life, set all his odd sensations down to the score of fatigue and trouble, and hastened to reach his journey's end.

So this dark autumnal evening Mr. Carstoe sat awaiting the arrival of his visitor, wondering in his slow way why on earth the young man should have come to California. He must have seen his cousin in New York, or if they missed each other, must have received the letters which would make all matters clear. It was useless for Mr. Carstoe to go to the station in the dark, for he and the young gentleman were utter strangers. Mr. Cromlin knew where to come; all Mr. Carstoe could do was to wait for him in the villa, and be certain that the housekeeper had a good dinner prepared in the guest's honour.

And Launce arrived. Late that night, he and Mr. Carstoe still sat in earnest conversation. There were no letters for Launce; Mr. Carstoe had himself gone over the papers of the deceased at Darrell's request.

"The whole thing was terribly sudden, though he had so long been in poor health," Mr. Carstoe said. "I am convinced that matters would have been different had he not put off too

long. I said so to Mr. Darrell Vaughan—I repeat it to you."

Launce already knew that his cousin inherited the fortune—let him have it. He did not care for the money, but to have come too late—that was what hurt. The manner of the bequest to himself would prevent his ever touching it; he could receive nothing from Darrell's bounty or condescension.

Mr. Carstoe told things in a slow fashion; but the facts of the will, as most important in his eyes, came out first, and he finally got to the affair of the codicil. Launce was struck dumb. Even in the dull misery of his mood, there rose a vision of that beautiful face which had so often of late haunted him. Had it been Fate which showed her to him that day? Time enough for such dreams; there was more prosaic business on hand now.

"A full account of these matters," Mr. Carstoe was saying, "your cousin and I wrote to you at your address in New York to be forwarded."

"What address?" asked Cromlin.

"Noble & Brothers, Exchange Place."

"I never even heard their names that I remember," said Launce.

"Very odd," replied Mr. Carstoe. "Your

cousin thought the letters would be sure to reach you there."

"The letter written me by my uncle; how was that sent?"

"To a Mr. Sandford, in New York. By the way, he is dead too—I saw a notice in an Eastern paper. An answer came from him after your uncle's death: he had forwarded the letter for you to a London banker, but did not mention the name, so your cousin thought we had better send ours to Noble & Brothers."

"A strange insanity on Darrell's part," said Launce dryly.

"A series of lamentable errors on everybody's," observed Carstoe. "Sir, I am heartily grieved. Mr. Vaughan was a peculiar man—a difficult man; but the most honourable and straightforward one I ever knew. Sir, he was a good friend to me."

There had been neither wine nor punch to quicken Mr. Carstoe's halting speech to-night. He spoke stiffly, with hesitation, but what he said had at least the merit of clearness.

"You are a good man, Mr. Carstoe," returned Launce, seizing his companion's hand, and causing Carstoe to look embarrassed and miserable by this impulsiveness. "See here,

sir, I have a sad weight on my mind; I want to know if you can help to clear it up."

Mr. Carstoe waited; he knew what was coming. Launce briefly related the story of his uncle's having suddenly refused to hold any communication with him in that letter in which he had disowned and cast him off.

"Now, did he ever talk to you about it, Mr. Carstoe? Do you know what he fancied I had done? He was a stern man, but never unjust."

Hesitation would only have been as foolish as it would be unkind.

"He did tell me, after finding out his error through Mr. Sandford's investigations," Mr. Carstoe said.

"What did he think?"

"That you had falsified a cheque he sent you," replied Mr. Carstoe.

Launce uttered a cry. Mr. Carstoe thought he was fainting, but he soon recovered himself.

"Tell me all you can," he said.

The agent gave the details. He could even recall the time at which the cheque had been sent—Launce's twenty-first birthday. After awhile Launce spoke.

"I never saw the cheque," he said slowly. "My uncle had arranged for my first year's expenses in Europe while I was with him in

Vermont; that was the last money I ever received. I only wrote him once before sailing. I had wanted to keep my broken arm a secret for fear he should defer my journey. I never saw that cheque, Mr. Carstoe!"

"That agrees with Mr. Sandford's idea that the bank teller must have been in the plot. But who could have got the cheque, and how?"

"Heaven knows," groaned Launce. "There is no way to find out now,—no step to take. Why, it's like an awful dream!"

He stopped, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"Remember that at least your uncle lived to believe in your innocence," Mr. Carstoe said, greatly moved.

"Thank God! Did he talk about me—did he seem to care for me?" Launce's voice broke.

"He talked about you constantly during that last fortnight,—mostly of the time when you were a boy. Ah! he had loved you dearly all the while. I was with him more than anybody. Well, sir, I know he meant to change his will. I supposed that Smith had drawn up a new one at the time the codicil was written. I expected to find that you and your cousin shared equally. I told Mr. Darrell so the night he arrived here.

I am bound to say he expressed a hope that I might be right; he was greatly attached to you and your uncle—very happy that your innocence had been established. But when the will was opened, I found the change had not been made."

"I don't care for the money," cried Launce. "At least he knew I was not a villain. Good God! how could it have come about? And he's dead, and there is no clue?"

"None," said Mr. Carstoe. "I know what I have told you, and I know nothing more."

He went over the details of the last days: Milady's two visits; Mr. Vaughan's seizure during his conversation with her, Carstoe himself being absent. On the previous night Smith the lawyer had been at the house. Mrs. Simpson and Anthony Turner had witnessed papers; but that was an occurrence too frequent to be important. Mr. Carstoe only mentioned it casually to show that up to the very hour of the paralytic stroke Mr. Vaughan's mind remained clear.

"I got back that evening," he went on huskily. "He knew me once—tried to tell me something."

"But you could not understand?"

"No. There were only broken words. I

caught, 'My boy—my boy—set right—time—I—'"

Mr. Carstoe's voice faltered. Launce remained silent. After awhile, the lawyer continued,—

"I understood when we opened the will. He had not made the change I supposed completed when the codicil was drawn up. That was what troubled him. But even if I had understood, it would have been too late then—too late, poor man!"

Mr. Carstoe paused, spread out his hands, and turned away.

"God bless you!" cried Launce, wringing his hand. "You have given me great comfort."

Mr. Carstoe put his head straight on his shoulders, and looked into the fire, more wooden than ever of aspect, to atone for his late weakness.

"Your cousin arrived the next day," he continued. "The old gentleman never knew him, nor anybody, though he lingered for more than a week. As I mentioned to you, poor Smith was killed only the day of Mr. Vaughan's attack. It was a week to be remembered in Moysterville—two citizens so prominent—"

"Did you ever see that woman again?" de-

manded Launce, ruthlessly interrupting this bit of eloquence.

"Ah! she could only have come to beg, or worse; probably her visit was a blind."

Then Mr. Carstoe told the story of the stolen jewels, and the lucky chance by which Darrell Vaughan had discovered her guilt. Launce listened attentively to the tale, the interest and excitement of the whole conversation since his arrival causing him to forget the peculiar physical sensations which had troubled him for days.

"And the woman saw my uncle twice?" he said at last.

"Yes; she came two days in succession. After her first visit, Mr. Vaughan told Mrs. Simpson to be sure and admit her when she returned."

"And she is now in the penitentiary?"

"She has not been taken there yet; she is still in the jail here. About the time she was to be sent, a great fire broke out in the women's ward of the penitentiary. The damages were so great, that they had none too much room for the prisoners already there."

"I remember now," Launce replied; "they mentioned it in San Francisco. It is supposed that it was set on fire—a plot for the escape of the convicts."

"Yes; and several did get away, but were retaken."

"So the woman is still here in the jail?" Launce said, after a few moments' thought. "Mr. Carstoe, I shall go to see her."

Carstoe looked surprised and puzzled.

"You don't suppose she could throw any light on the matter which troubles you? Mr. Vaughan got his information from Sandford."

"I don't know that I expect anything. All the same, I shall go to see Milady, if I can get the permission."

The next morning Mr. Carstoe occupied himself in procuring the necessary permit—not difficult to obtain, since it is he who asks it for a nephew of the late Mr. Vaughan.

The two go to the jail together; Mr. Carstoe even accompanies Launce into the women's ward, and with him follows the keeper down the corridor into which Milady's cell opens. Mr. Carstoe has no intention of sharing the interview, he did not mean to come so far; but somehow a painful, irresistible fascination has led him on.

The doors of all the cells have a square window secured by iron gratings. The shutters are open at this hour; at almost every

loophole some haggard or evil face peers out at the passers.

"There 's Milady taking a peep too," the turnkey says in a low voice, when they have nearly reached the end of the passage. "It 's unusual for her to stand there."

Both gentlemen see her distinctly. Mr. Carstoe hesitates, then stops; at the same instant Milady disappears.

"I 'll go back and wait in the matron's parlour," Mr. Carstoe says to Launce. "I didn't mean to come—I wouldn't have seen her for the world."

Launce nods, and passes on with the keeper.

"I 've brought you a visitor," the man says, looking through the bars. "I hope you will be a little more civil to Mr. Cromlin than you generally are to people."

He unlocks the door, stands back for Launce to enter, and closes it behind him.

Milady is seated in the furthest corner of the cell, her head resting on her hands. She still wears the rusty-black silk dress, and the faded shawl of Indian cashmere is gathered over her shoulders.

Launce stands silent for a few seconds, but as she neither stirs nor looks up, he says gently,—

"I want to talk with you a little, if you will let me."

Milady raises her head quickly, and flashes her stormy eyes upon him.

Launce's first thought is that an insane asylum would be the proper place of captivity for her—those eyes can only belong to a mad woman. Then, artist like, he is struck by the picturesque shadow of beauty which hangs about her still—a mere shadow, which someway in connexion with that wasted face is more appalling than any ugliness could have been.

"What did he call you?" she asks in her hollow voice.

"My name is Cromlin," Launce replies.

She is half out of her seat. He has the same feeling which strikes any beholder each time she moves—that she is about to spring at him like a panther. But she sinks back on the bench. A strange light, which for an instant altered the expression of her eyes, dies out. Singular changes pass over her face, but Launce cannot interpret them. They are like a wild mingling of hope, resolve, doubt, and then a quick, insane cunning and suspicion.

"Carstoe was with him," she mutters.

"What did you say?" Launce asks, still

speaking in that kindly voice. He has not time to reflect that such is the case, but his mind is full of pity and sympathy for the creature. "I did not hear."

"I said you must catch a bird before you can put salt on its tail," returns Milady, with one of her dreadful laughs. Her countenance has resumed its usual sullen, defiant look, yet there is a certain eagerness in her eyes, and she watches him narrowly.

"When you first came to Moysterville, you went twice to see old Mr. Vaughan," says Launce. "He was my uncle."

"'O my prophetic soul,' dear Hamlet!" sneers Milady. "Hadn't you better send for the Marines if you want to spin a yarn? I say, Buffer, a drink would be a blessing."

Yet Launce noticed the eagerness in her eyes—the suspicion in her face. He knows they have a meaning; that if he could only find out the significance of both she might be induced to talk earnestly.

"I think," Launce says, "that you put a wrong construction on my visit—you do not really believe that I am Mr. Vaughan's nephew."

She starts again at the name, but once more the suspicion masters the eagerness in her eyes.

It wouldn't be half the fun if you 're not a parson."

But Launce will not yet relinquish his purpose. He feels that he has committed an error in mentioning Mr. Carstoe, so he tries to set it right.

"You think he is your enemy. Why Mr. Carstoe pities you from the bottom of his heart. He would be the first to head a petition for pardon if you would even now give information that could put justice on the track of those bad men who led you on. He would do it even if he never recovered the jewels."

"Ah," says Milady, "we 've got to that! It 's the way he interests Carstoe in keeping up the game. Sail a-head, young man!"

"He — whom do you mean?" asks Launce.

"Your friend the Devil," retorts Milady. "Handsome Devil isn't he—O we women!"

Each word has its meaning, Launce feels sure, aimless and coarse as her answers sound, if he could only catch the right clue.

"You were with my uncle when that attack came on," pursues he. That first appeal had seemed to affect her, he will follow it up. "I cannot help believing you had some strong motive for those visits; at least tell me if they

in any way bear upon this mystery which has darkened my life for years."

"Ten years," mutters Milady; "he said so! And after that, ten years! Didn't you hear the judge repeat it? He'd been taught his lesson too."

A sense of discouragement comes over Launce. The pain and lassitude of the last days make themselves felt again, and it is an effort to concentrate his thoughts.

"You'll not help me?" he says wearily.

"How much was your share to be?" asks Milady, with that look of half-insane cunning. "Are you to be paid anyway? I thought that Devil was satisfied now he has me safe. 'Ten years, and then again ten!'" Her voice becomes a groan, but she quickly bursts into a laugh, and adds, in her hardest, most defiant fashion, "I'll go you a pile of Mexican dollars against a cent that I live it through and come out. I will live—I *will!*"—she fairly shrieks, shaking her clenched fists. "Live and come out—Devil, Devil!"

"Think—just by giving these men up to justice you could be free very soon," urges Launce. "They could not harm you; you would have friends—be kept safe—"

"'Come into my parlour, said the spider to

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"Think—just by giving these men up to justice you could be free very soon," urges Launce. "They could not harm you; you would have friends—be kept safe—"

"'Come into my parlour, said the spider to

the fly,'" sang Milady in a hoarse contralto, laughing still, always that crazy cunning in her eyes.

"If I could only tell what it is you suspect —whom you fear," says Launce, his tired faculties growing confused under this feeling that her reticence conceals a mystery.

"Devil, handsome Devil!" croaks Milady.

"Let the rest go," says Launce; "at least you would cheat the Devil a little by this favour I ask. Only tell me if your visit to my uncle threw any light on the crime he suspected me of."

"Do the dead ever get out of their graves?" whispers Milady. "I thought I saw Jem last night." But in an instant she is laughing, and screams out, "Lord, if Jem could come back, what a kettle of fish! But he's safe six foot underground, and I'm as good as buried— Devil, Devil!"

She is becoming greatly excited. The keeper has warned Launce that she is subject to moods so like insanity that he believes she will end soon a hopeless maniac. Cromlin is himself growing more conscious of fatigue and weakness each moment, now that he has lost the hope which brought him here. But a new thought strikes him—he will try one further plea.

"If you will not help me, or even tell me whether it is in your power," he says, "I will not be so hard and unkind as you are. They tell me you have a child; let me know where it is and I will find it, and send you word of its welfare."

Milady is out of her seat; she has sprung at him lithe and dangerous as a panther. He has only time to avoid her clutching hands by a quick movement. She totters against the wall, weak, half-fainting, her features convulsed, her eyes like nothing human; but he hears broken words as she gnashes her teeth till the blood-specked foam flies from her lips.

"*That* was it—Devil, Devil!—to get the child—a hold if I came out—the child!"

Then with a shriek she falls prostrate upon the floor, writhing in awful spasms.

The turnkey comes, the matron and doctor are sent for. Launce is obliged to go away. He joins Mr. Carstoe, and they wait until news is brought that Milady is better, though still wandering in her mind.

Launce Cromlin has had no intention of making any stay in California. This night he goes to bed early, so oppressed by distracting thoughts that conversation or connected meditation is an impossibility.

He sleeps brokenly, and lives through dismal experiences in his slumber. Sometimes Darrell is trying to drag him over a precipice. Sometimes Elizabeth Crauford is on trial for the theft of the jewels, and he endeavouring to save her; while his uncle stands by in his shroud, making signs that he wishes to speak words he is powerless to utter, and Elizabeth's face changes to that of Milady, and Darrell is laughing hideously at both.

Then he wakes, sleeps again, and a worse confusion follows. Now he is imprisoned among red-hot iron bars, now freezing to death in a snow-pass of the Sierras—always seeing Darrell and scores of other familiar countenances, and hearing his uncle's voice.

The morning comes, and, when Mr. Carstoe ventures to call his dilatory guest to breakfast, he finds him raving in the delirium of the terrible Chagres fever, and the next three months are little better than a blank to Launce Cromlin.

CHAPTER XI.

OUTWITTED.

Good, prim, ceremonious Monsieur La Tour! It was fortunate that he entertained the strictest and most ancient ideas in regard to the panoply of reserve and timidity in which demoiselles ought to be wrapped, otherwise the reception he got from Nathalie must have struck an ominous chill to his heart. But his notion of the greeting proper under the circumstances was to bow low over her hand, to imprint a decorous kiss thereon, to offer a long-winded compliment on her appearance, and express his overwhelming delight at seeing her, in elegantly correct French, which sounded like a jumble of quotations from Boileau and Telemachus.

Madame L'Estrange leaned back among her pillows and watched the scene, with her haggard features and eager eyes softened into contentment. The scene was so precise, so proper, so dull, that she liked it; her one desire for

Nathalie's future was quiet and respectability. Susanne stood behind Madame's sofa, ostensibly arranging her cushions, in reality watching Nathalie, with an odd expression, which might have disturbed the girl had she noticed it. But Nathalie was too busy with the rush of rebellious thoughts which oppressed her to observe Susanne. She did perceive that Monsieur had bought a new wig in honour of his return, and she longed to knock it off and step on it. She had hurried into the house with some mad idea of crying out at once that she would never marry him, never; of defying her mother and daring the full brunt of her wrath. But once in the room, her courage failed. The light clasp of Monsieur's fingers seemed a hold that she could not break. If, indeed, any wild words she might utter were to free her from him, she knew that confinement or a convent would be her portion. Excitable as she was, her natural artfulness came to her aid and restored her reason. Her one hope lay in cajoling and wheedling both mother and betrothed—gaining time,—if she could only do that!

Susanne, watching her always, saw the sudden change in her face. Nathalie grew smiling, talked gaily, said courteous things,

indulged even in fun, in raillery which would have called down disapproval from her mother, had not Monsieur appeared in a state of high delight with her conversation. Susanne gave a long sniff of suspicion.

"She means mischief," thought that shrewd personage. "Eh, well, it is lucky that I have eyes in my head. Once married, Monsieur must look after her himself, and I do not envy him his task; but until then—no, no, Mademoiselle! You are very crafty, but you are no match for Susanne yet, and I shall see that you do not go straight to the Devil, as you are inclined."

Monsieur displayed the presents he had brought. It would have been impossible for Nathalie not to derive satisfaction from the sight of ornaments, even at her last gasp. She tried on the bracelet and necklace, and fluttered the pretty fan, and was happy for five minutes. Then she remembered Vaughan, and longed to dash the baubles on the floor, and give way to her rebellious impulses, but had sense to perceive that by so doing she would ruin her one faint hope of escape. The hope was wild, mad, and she knew it, but she clung thereto notwithstanding.

Monsieur remained all the afternoon and

evening. Nathalie found no opportunity to slip out of the house, though she was half crazy from her belief that Vaughan would return, and be lingering somewhere near toward sunset. At that very hour she was obliged to walk Monsieur on the lawn,—Madame actually permitted it,—obliged to sit with him under the poplar-tree and listen to his talk, which grew more lover-like than ever before.

If she could tell him — he seemed kind-hearted—but tell him what? That she could not marry him because she loved a stranger, a man whom she had only seen a few times in all? Nathalie could not do this; the utter insanity of such an avowal struck even her. No, she must wait. If she could only see Vaughan! He loved her—surely he loved her! Now that the time was shortening so terribly —Monsieur returned—Vaughan would break through all ordinary rules, and find means to save her.

While Nathalie tried to listen to Monsieur's conversation, and to quiet herself with the belief that she should yet escape her bonds, Susanne was warning her mistress.

"Hé!" cried that astute individual, with abrupt disregard of Madame's shattered nerves.

"We have held together many years, and I am not going to desert Madame now. I may have my faults,—time enough for perfection when one gets to heaven,—but I shall not do that."

"What are you talking about, Susanne?" demanded the sick woman irritably.

"Use your eyes, Madame, use your eyes!" cried Susanne, shaking herself up and down with great energy.

"What does the creature mean?" asked Madame more peevishly, yet in a good deal of trepidation.

"Do you want a wedding—do you want to be sure she is safe out of harm's way?" continued Susanne. "Do you trust that quiet and submission, and you knowing women?"

"*Mon Dieu*, what is it? Tell me Susanne; you will make me ill, you will upset my night."

"That is just what must not happen; you must keep all your wits about you, and be able to act," returned Susanne. "Look here. I engage to watch her for three days and nights; if she is not married then, I wash my hands of the consequences."

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" moaned Madame. "What is it—what has happened?"

"Nothing yet; but marry her at once, or she will refuse. I saw it in her face to-day. The Devil is in it, that Madame cannot understand!" cried Susanne fiercely, as poor Madame shook and gasped and stared at her in nervous dread. "This is it, then! That young American has been hanging about. She has met him twice. I got it out of that old idiot of a Rosine. I saw him plainly enough when I went to call her, but I made no sign."

It required immense self-control on the part of Madame to restrain the hysterics and spasms, which would have left her powerless. For a few seconds she wrung her hands and uttered a jumble of prayers and imprecations. Susanne delivered a brief lecture on the propriety of showing common-sense in a case like this.

"If you lose any time you will lose her," said Susanne. "Swallow your medicine quick, and be strong."

The cold drops of perspiration stood on Madame's forehead; her teeth chattered as if they would break the wine-glass Susanne held to her lips; but something of the old, resolute will was yet left in the enfeebled frame, and she would not give way. It required very slight explanation to make her understand the case thoroughly. Feminine weaknesses or

insanities could never take Madame much by surprise, after her varied experience of life.

"There is no harm done," said Susanne. "It struck me Mademoiselle had grown very fond of her promenader, and yesterday it all came over me in a flash—I cannot tell how, but it did! That old Rosine had an important air, and Mademoiselle was odd. Eh, well, it is no matter, I saw him!"

"I cannot think easily, I am so dull now," moaned Madame.

"The marriage must take place at once, of course. Monsieur will want it. Everything was ready, even to the licence, before he went away. Does not Madame see?"

"Ah, yes! I shall tell him I am worse; there must be no delay. O that wretched girl!" cried Madame with sudden anger in her voice.

"Bah! one is not a woman for nothing," returned Susanne. "Take good care, Madame; be very sweet to her—give her no chance to rebel; there is no telling what she might do. Come now; you are better—you can manage?"

"Yes; but Holy Virgin, I shall die after—I know I shall; this agitation will be too much for me."

"And so you ought," was Susanne's mental

comment, but she spoke some comforting words, and was altogether very helpful and amiable. Indeed, Susanne quite enjoyed the excitement and the plotting, after the decorous dullness into which their lives had so long ago slipped without break or variety. "Let Madame trust me; all she need do is to give Monsieur a hint that he may have his wife any day—he will be eager enough—I shall manage the rest! I am equal to the occasion—yes, indeed! I know my own talents, the saints be praised, and I am not wicked enough to under-value them."

"Susanne, if you never lose sight of her—if we succeed—I will not wait for what I have put you down in my will. I shall give you five hundred francs the morning of the marriage," said Madame, catching her attendant's hand between her bony fingers.

"That is only fair! I am proud in the right way, thank God, and am willing always to accept my due," said Susanne. "Let Madame be perfectly tranquil; I have a scheme. Ta, ta, how quick one's invention is at times. Hark, they are coming back! Do not lose a moment in speaking to Monsieur."

Madame raised herself on her elbow as the betrothed pair entered, and gazed anxiously at her daughter. She could read the impatience

—all the varied feelings which showed in the girl's face under its assumed calmness. That very effort at composure frightened Madame more than ever; it was unlike Nathalie; she must mean mischief indeed.

"Dear child," said Madame, "go with Susanne for a little; I have to talk with our good friend here."

Nathalie hurried along the gallery to her *salon*, and made for the outer door. It was scarcely yet twilight; she might still find Vaughan. But on the threshold she met Susanne, and Susanne said in a tone of cheerful interest,—

"I just saw that handsome American go past. He was walking; but a carriage stopped, and he drove off in it with the two gentlemen."

Nathalie would have liked to scream—to go into a fury—anything as a vent to her disappointment. But after all, Susanne was not to blame. She turned back into her *salon*, and sat down among the shadows until she was again summoned into the presence of her mother and future husband.

Monsieur spent the evening—the evening which Nathalie thought would never end. There was a change in Monsieur's manner;

something even more tender and gallant than usual, but which betrayed a certain air of proprietorship. He was in wonderful spirits, too; he reminded Nathalie again of an elderly sheep trying to frisk himself into the belief that he was a lamb. The carriage came for him at last; he had made his adieu to Madame. As he approached Nathalie, she shrunk back from the smile that rendered his face eager, kind and gentle as the smile was. He did not content himself with kissing her hands; he leaned forward and pressed his lips upon her forehead.

"I have Madame's permission?" he asked laughing.

"I shall so soon lose all claim to direct," returned Madame, laughing too, "that I may as well resign my authority at once."

Nathalie smothered a little cry of fear and disgust. A few more pleasant words passed between her mother and Monsieur, then he left the room.

"I shall go to bed," said Madame. "My dear, on the day after to-morrow we must part for a time; you will be Madame La Tour."

"So soon? No—I cannot—I will not!" gasped Nathalie.

"So soon? Odd words to apply to a

marriage that has already been delayed five whole weeks beyond the original time," said Madame in an icy voice. "Cannot—will not? Stranger words still from a daughter to her mother, especially when she speaks of marrying a man to whom she has been betrothed for months."

Madame's stony calmness rendered Nathalie more hopeless.

"He came back so suddenly—I cannot—O, he might give me a week," faltered the girl.

"Mademoiselle is dramatic," sneered Madame, preserving her composure by a powerful effort, conscious that it was her greatest stronghold. "I am willing, if it amuses you! One thing is certain; of course, at this late day, you contemplate no real opposition? You accepted Monsieur La Tour; you wished to marry him; you will do so on Thursday."

"I did not know—I was a child—I—"

"Pray do not force me to go further, and say that you are an idiot," interrupted Madame. "Bah, what is this? I am told that American girls do such disgraceful things—break off their engagements at the last moment. You have a mother who does not understand such savage customs. Silence—go to bed! I know you are not in earnest; you just want a little

romance, but it is not proper; besides, I am too feeble and ill to enjoy it with you."

"My mother, O my mother!" cried Nathalie.

She thought she could make an eloquent speech, but no words came. The rigid laws which surround an unmarried woman in France were full in her mind. The utter futility of softening or changing her mother struck her too. The recklessness that stood her in place of force of character was gone for the time; her temper gave no aid. Frightened and miserable, she burst into passionate tears.

"Good!" thought Susanne, watching the interview from behind the dining-room door. "We shall not have much trouble, after all."

She began to carol a pleasant ditty, as if she had just entered, and wished to announce her approach.

"Is Madame ready for me?" she called, in her most respectful voice.

"Yes; come in, Susanne," replied her mistress.

"Wait," pleaded Nathalie; "let me speak—let me tell you! Susanne, go away for awhile."

"What did Mademoiselle say?" asked Susanne, entering. "Yes; she is quite right, Madame ought to be in bed. Ah, Made-

moiselle is always thoughful, and we are to lose her so soon—so soon!"

"You dreadful old woman—you wicked old woman!" sobbed Nathalie.

It was not in the least as she would have expected to behave, but she felt so powerless—such a child.

"Joseph, Marie, and Saint Geneviève!" ejaculated Susanne in a shrill staccato. "Eh, eh, what we all need is sleep! Mademoiselle is nervous; she shall have some of Madame's drops."

"Mademoiselle is inclined to prefer a convent to marriage, but I fancy the night will bring wisdom," observed Madame in her icy voice.

"Ta, ta! girls always feel like that when the wedding-day gets so near. It is nothing—a mere nothing," pronounced Susanne, cheerfully. "She does not really mind, we do not mind; and Monsieur knows that tears are quite *en règle*, so he will not mind."

"Susanne, I would like to murder you!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Dear heart, only listen!" returned Susanne, affecting still to consider the whole matter a joke. "But we must not play any longer. Madame needs to go to bed; she will be ill otherwise."

"I am ill — I suffer — O, O!" It struck Madame that she might as well now yield to her real agitation. If Nathalie received a thorough fright, that would finish the work her mother's firmness had begun.

Usually the girl was ordered away when these attacks came on, but she was detained to-night, made to help, and Susanne pretended to be horribly alarmed, though in reality the seizure was nothing compared to many she had witnessed.

Not a word of upbraiding did Madame utter. When she could speak again, she fixed her great eyes on Nathalie, and said faintly,—

"It is possible there may be no wedding after all on Thursday; there may be a funeral though."

Nathalie was sent off to her room, and her terror was so great that she thought less of her own misery than her mother's words, and no mode of escape would suggest itself to her weary brain.

The next morning Nathalie found Madame sweet and amiable; anxious for her society too, but showing symptoms of spasms if Nathalie so much as moved quickly.

Susanne faithfully fulfilled her promise of watching. Rosine came up stairs on some

pretence, and managed to convey a letter to Nathalie. This Susanne could not prevent, so she appeared blind. A little later, Nathalie went out on the gallery. She dropped a folded paper, apparently by accident. Rosine was picking up twigs and sticks about the lawn, conveniently placed to seize the note. As she entered the passage on the ground-floor where the *fermier* lived, Susanne loomed before her.

"Mademoiselle desired me to take the billet," she said; "it was not for you to pick it up."

Rosine demurred.

"Give me that note or I will break every bone in thy accursed body and suck thy black blood—dolt, fish, cabbage!" cried Susanne, so fierce of aspect that Rosine yielded the prize without a struggle. "You to be trusted with such delicate matters—set you up, indeed! You are to go by train to Lausanne and see if that vile embroidery-woman has finished the work we gave her. Be off at once, laziest and ugliest! Fly to catch the train; here is money. Make any blunder, and I will eat you without salt at precisely seven o'clock to-night, tough and black as you are, vile Swiss!"

And Susanne snapped her teeth together with a noise which froze Rosine's blood.

So the old woman was disposed of for the day.

Monsieur appeared: Monsieur, in a state of gallantry and pleasant agitation, full of old-fashioned compliments for Nathalie, which nearly drove her out of her senses. But Madame had prepared him to find her odd, capricious, in tears perhaps.

"It is always the way," she said; "girls invariably get frightened when the time comes. Ten to one, she will beg for a few days or say she hates you. It is nothing, trust me; I know my sex; a mere affair of nerves, no more."

Monsieur, in his goodness, was prepared to be patient and considerate to any extent, but Nathalie did not alarm him by tears or other passionate outbreak. Indeed, she was upheld by a vague hope—of what she did not think at all clearly. Vaughan had written and begged her to meet him. What she expected she could not have told; certainly even in her romance not that he should ask her to fly with him, and that she should consent to go. She had sufficient practical sense in spite of the extravagance of her ideas to remember he was a stranger, well as it seemed to her that she knew him.

Susanne left the house on a little affair of her own, leaving Nathalie safe for the time between her mother and Monsieur. Susanne strayed about until she met Darrell Vaughan. She informed the American that she came from Nathalie; the young lady had not been able to write. She begged him to be very careful—not to come near the house, or even send her a note, for a day or two. Susanne promised to meet him for a moment on the following day, and was profuse in her wishes to serve them both. She never pocketed money with more satisfaction in her life than she felt in storing away the gold piece Vaughan put in her hand. Having to plot and plan, lie and cheat the two young people, made Susanne feel at least ten years younger. Be it said for her, too, that she was fond of both Madame and Nathalie in her way, and had no mind to see the girl ruin her future by any act of mad folly, and Susanne's ideas of the lengths to which her sex would go under sufficient inducement or provocation were wide indeed.

The next day Nathalie found no opportunity even to speak with Rosine; wherever she moved, Susanne was beside her, amiable, and in her most conversational mood. She tried to vex the woman; Susanne was not to be irritated.

She had suddenly developed a patience that was little short of angelic. Nathalie was completely hemmed in—powerless. She broke down at last, enraged her mother, and alarmed Monsieur by an hysterical outburst. Susanne pounced upon her immediately; this was what she had been waiting for. She put her to bed, dosed her with *tisanes* that had several drops of Madame's morphine mingled with their nastiness.

"Ah," thought Susanne, quite touched by her own talent and virtue, "I shall never get a fitting reward in this world for all my sacrifices, but they ought to count in the next."

Susanne thought of several little sins she could commit on the strength of these present efforts for good, which she regarded as a sort of absolution taken out in advance. She saw Vaughan again, and set a time for him to come to the house—Thursday at two o'clock.

"I cannot stop to answer questions. Be in the chalet grounds at that hour," said she, and was gone, chuckling over this last stroke, which would give a dramatic finish to the business.

There was no escape. Nathalie comprehended that Susanne had outwitted her, but was ignorant of the means. One other attempt

at a scene was put down by her mother with a high hand.

"I give you a choice," said she; "the wedding or to start for the convent—as a novice too. Do you prefer marriage or taking the veil? One or the other—I will not be disgraced—I am a dying woman."

It was Thursday afternoon. Darrell Vaughan approached the chalet gates; he saw a carriage drive past and take the road which led up to the station. Susanne was standing on the door-step, her handkerchief at her eyes.

"We have lost her," said that worthy woman; "Mademoiselle was married half-an-hour ago."

She extended her hand. It might have been to point towards the station; it might have been to receive any little reward which the American should feel disposed to bestow upon her.

So Vaughan set out on his journey that night, going as far as Brieg by the rail, that he might have daylight for crossing the Simplon. He was furious. He knew that he had been saved from an insanity which might have endangered his whole future, but he was furious nevertheless. He had never before failed in any scheme upon which his fancy—his heart he would have said—fixed itself. Brief as the dream was, it

had taken a powerful hold of his mind; he felt almost ready to throw up his entire plan, let everything go, and follow Nathalie. But he could not be crazy enough for this. He must set out on his journey; the rage and mad desire would pass.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

PISA is a stupid old place, that is to people who crave society. But Mr. Crauford found a few acquaintances to make up his whist-table, and was content. This satisfied Elizabeth. She dreaded nothing so much as the seasons when her father was seized with a whim of thoughtfulness on her account, and insisted on a sojourn in some resort where balls and gaieties could be found. Not that she was too lofty and visionary to enjoy these pleasures, but a dread always haunted her that such things were a waste of time.

She was given to reading authors who are eager for reforms, and tell us eloquently about the misery there is in the world, and Elizabeth wanted to be "up and doing" instead of casting in her lot among the butterflies, agreeable as their holiday existence might be in certain ways.

She was happy in the dear old town. She

enjoyed straying about the Campo Santo or marvelling over the beautiful Cathedral, the Baptistery, the Leaning Tower — that most picturesque of all groups of buildings, standing in the grass-grown square where everything is so still, where the bells sound dreamy and indolent, and the very beggars are too lazy to rise and persecute any unfortunate stranger who may approach. The place carries one back centuries. One would not be surprised to see Galileo saunter past, nor be startled if a troop of Crusaders halted to say a prayer in the church before setting out for the Holy Land.

The Craufords found a charming apartment in a faded old palace which had once been the home of some almost royal family. Elizabeth delighted in the vast *salons*, that still contained many articles of the ancient furniture, curiously carved chairs, wonderful inlaid cabinets, and the like. There was a balcony, too, from whence she could look out over the distant hills, and watch sunsets and the moonlight, and lose herself in those dreams which were a source of reproach to her, much as she enjoyed them. She feared that they too were a sad waste of time.

She told herself that she had been very idle of late, and prepared to make amends. She

brought out her wisest, heaviest books, and pored diligently over musty tomes, afraid that she found them slightly dull, wishing for some real occupation, fearful that her life was a very useless one, and wondering vaguely about the illimitable future, which must ever be so attractive to the young.

Elizabeth Crauford was an enthusiast and a worshipper of idols. Of that latter necessity in her nature, no better proof could have been afforded than the ardour with which she struggled to throw a halo about her father. In his case, if ever she failed, a tender pity might still keep her heart soft; but in other instances of disappointment a rather hard contempt would be the feeling left in Elizabeth's mind toward the object which proved unworthy her worship. Most of her ideas were extreme, as was natural at her age. Duty and self-sacrifice were somewhat confused in her thoughts. It was to be feared that she would often mistake the latter for the former, and bring much pain upon herself. She was singularly clear in her reflections and analyses, in spite of this. She might have become that usually to be dreaded character, "well regulated," had not her impulsiveness and imaginative tendencies stood in the way. Warm-hearted

and affectionate, but a very proud woman too. I was wrong to employ that word. She was thoroughly a girl. It would not have been easy to predicate her future character,—so much, with her peculiar organization, would depend on whether she found happiness or the reverse.

She was a beautiful girl too. Not tall, but somehow her figure gave the effect of height; a free, graceful carriage; a face full of promise, possessing a beauty beyond mere girlish loveliness; a mouth which, in repose, looked, as Nathalie had said, a little sad, almost stern sometimes, but which had a world of delicious smiles, when she would permit them their freedom; a complexion exquisitely fair, too pale perhaps ordinarily; a low, broad forehead and rippling masses of hair that had the tints of bronze in its waves. The eyes were grey or hazel according to the light—eyes which softened easily or grew black with excitement. A peculiarly sweet, rich voice; an earnest, truthful mode of speech, which gave one a feeling of respect and confidence. A carefully-educated young person, with a love for languages that extended even to the grand old tongues which have no echoes left save in the depth and strength they have here and there given to the weak, musical dialects which have

sprung out of their dead grandeur. Elizabeth was a little ashamed of her ability to read the Latin poets and to understand Plato. Nothing less like the awful creature conjured up by the term "blue" could be imagined. I may as well confess the extremity of her sins at once: she could even make her way among the crabbed Hebrew characters. When about fifteen, she had spent a year in the society of an old relative who was a clergyman, with failing sight, and Elizabeth had plunged into the study that she might be able to aid his purblind eyes. She guarded her secret as carefully as if it were something disgraceful, and her father would undoubtedly have been shocked. He believed in pretty accomplishments for young ladies—decorous pianoforte playing, feeble drawing, a good accent in French and Italian —but Hebrew! No scented dandy of Piccadilly or Murray Hill, with an inability to pronounce the letter *r*, could have been more horrified than Mr. Crauford had he known the truth. Fortunately he lived and died without ever suspecting it.

To do something with her life—not *be* something—was Elizabeth's pet dream. If her father had been a learned man, or ambitious, she could have aided him. She was very useful,

and as attentive a daughter as if she had never dreamed dreams; but while alive to the practical side of existence, Elizabeth thirsted to gratify her visionary and enthusiastic propensities. Some one to look up to and worship; some one who out of his greatness might stoop to make her poor gifts and studies of service in his cause. Failing this, to be a sort of sister of charity; employ her money to found some wonderful institution for good, wherein she should toil humbly, no human being ever knowing that her efforts and wealth had been the foundation of these results.

All her thoughts and plans were vague enough—this was excusable at her age. Indeed, I am free to admit that she was probably much more lovable for this very reason. She had too slight faith in her own abilities to render her either bold or forward in her hopes. I suppose she thought occasionally of loving and being loved,—a youthful soul without such fancies would be as unnatural as is a flower without perfume,—yet she was oddly shy, perhaps foolishly so, even with her own thoughts, where these matters were concerned.

I think she had more than once dreamed of wedding a missionary. Not that the pictures drawn of those unrecognized saints often in-

terested her, even when done by admiring hands who put their hearts into their work; but the idea of such self-sacrifice appealed to her strongly. She doubted if love or marriage would come to her. Certainly there was little prospect that any man of her own age would be attracted toward her. Elizabeth feared that she was dull and proud; and she had no opinion whatever of her own beauty. She often complained to herself, when she caught sight of her image in a mirror, that she looked like a statue or something cut out of a picture —one of those straight-nosed, broad-browed, serious-eyed women, who might serve as a model for a pre-Raphaelite artist, but possessing nothing that one could call loveliness, or that would please a man, young like herself. It was very grand, no doubt, to think of being loved by some elderly sage, some philosopher, who had long since left his youth on the steep road of fame up which he had so gallantly travelled; still—Elizabeth smiled and blushed, too, in recognition of her own folly—that life would appear brighter, fuller of colour, if the love of a hero, possessed of youthful aspirations like her own, might be granted. It never would. Indeed, she could not be said to dwell upon such fancies. Having no direct aim, her

visions were all very impassable; but, dreamer as she was, the apprenticeship she served in humouring and waiting on her father might have qualified her to share even the destiny of her fancied missionary.

The soft Italian days floated by. Elizabeth, when not absorbed by her parent's caprices, was busy with her books, or her music, or drawing; but to what end became a question that haunted her more and more. "They also serve who only stand and wait!" She had often to repeat that glorious sermon in a line to herself during this season, afraid she was growing impatient and discontented. But you are not to get the idea that she was either morbid or restless. She only wanted to be sure that she was doing the best with duties as existence offered. Elizabeth's conscience was a rather uneasy one. Not unseldom you may see that in consciences which are devoid of spot or stain. Perhaps they flutter restlessly just because they have no weight to steady them, for I observe that the heavily-laden ones usually seem to bear their burden blithely enough.

One day Elizabeth was sitting in her favourite nook, near a window of the inner *salon*, a window which opened upon the

balcony. She was at work on an illumination —a quaint old-fashioned task which seemed just meant for her. She was dressed in a white robe of some soft yielding material, that fell about her in broad folds, and swept away over the floor in a train which she had the art of managing as few women can do. There were bits of vivid blue at her throat and waist, a knot of blue flowers in her hair. The wide sleeves were open almost from the shoulder, and displayed the rounded beauty of her arms, as they rested on the crimson covering of the table. A ray of sunlight stole in through the open casement, and cast golden reflections about her head—not like a crown, she seemed too spiritual for that thought—like a halo. Had one been fanciful, one might have gone further and likened it to a virgin martyr's symbol. Behind her, through the window, showed a background of towers, a castellated sweep of buildings, the river; still beyond, the glory of the mountains and the amber radiance of the sky.

Her father entered suddenly with a guest; so quietly, too, that Elizabeth, absorbed in her task, was unconscious of their approach till they had nearly reached her. Then she sat quite still, for her rather short sight had not

made out the second figure, but she supposed it a gossip of Mr. Crauford's who often visited them.

"My daughter, Mr. Vaughan," said her father, just as Elizabeth had discovered that the guest was a stranger. "Elizabeth, Mr. Vaughan is the nephew of a very old friend of mine; you have often heard of his uncle. We must make Mr. Darrell welcome for his own and his uncle's sake."

So Elizabeth rose in her slow, queenly fashion, looking like some vestal that had been called down from a noble dream—like some vision of ancient romance—like anything rather than an ordinary creature belonging to this prosaic century, and stood face to face with Darrell Vaughan. She regarded this claimant presented for her favour with a serious gaze, finding it difficult to get quickly enough back from her abstraction.

"You are very welcome, Mr. Vaughan," she said, and the words, which otherwise might have sounded a little stiff and studied, took a pleasing depth and earnestness when uttered in that marvellous voice, rendered sweeter by the look of pleasure which softened her lips into an almost child-like smile.

Vaughan was quite able to appreciate the

picture which had met his eyes as he walked up the room. Now the living figure stepped from its frame, and he was able to recognize, also to admire, the grace and spiritual beauty that showed in face and form and brightened the grave eyes which met his with an odd mingling of sovereignty and maiden reserve.

Vaughan perceived that he had arrived at a new experience, and the new and strange were always attractive to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STONE FIGHT.

MANY hundred years ago a tolerably lofty stone-wall surrounded Pisa, over against which the Florentines often sat down, armed with battering-rams and all the heavy implements of an ancient siege. Within these walls a broad road circled the city, and in those days the inhabitants at one gate considered them dwelling outside the others almost as great strangers as they did the Florentines. In those times, too, Pisa was celebrated for stone-fights, waged between boys of the different quarters, either brought about by deliberate challenge or the reckless incursion of a troop beyond the limits of their own territory.

The battles with the Florentines have long since degenerated into mere wordy contests, but the moss-grown walls remain, the white road encircling the town remains too, and here still may be witnessed every now and then a

relic of mediæval barbarism—a repetition of the famous stone contests.

The morning after his arrival in the quaint dull town, Darrell Vaughan went out for a walk. He crossed the Arno by the bridge of the old fortress, and, passing through one of the few .sunny streets, took the broad highway which follows the walls. He had scarcely met a human being or heard a sound. Suddenly the rush of feet along the paved road roused him, the shrill tones of scores of young voices, the whiz and whir of stones. He turned an angle and found himself in the midst of a retreating army. He could not have believed there were so many children to be seen in the dead old place. Boys of all ages and sizes, from six years up to sixteen, were fleeing, hotly pursued by a larger crowd of similar age and size.

Shrieks and imprecations made a hideous din. It was wonderful also to see the childish faces, usually so careless and good-natured, roused into a fury or set in rigid passion, which gave them the look of the old Tuscan portraits one finds in mouldy picture-galleries. The retreating foe wheeled about—wheeled so quickly that they took their pursuers by surprise. Again a volley of stones darkened the air. Down

went more than one combatant on either side. Yells of rage and triumph rose more deafening than ever.

Vaughan found his position by no means agreeable or safe. The missiles were flying about his ears like hail, and the struggling hosts paid as little attention to him as two armies of ants do to a philosophical human being marvelling over their battles. So Vaughan ensconced himself in a niche where a very deformed figure of the Virgin resided in a diminutive chamber which sadly needed scouring, and stood still to watch the fight, so exactly similar, save in the modern costumes, to the famous encounters of old, out of which so often grew fierce disputes and quarrels that disturbed the whole city for weeks, and were the means of one-half the town frequently being ambuscaded by the other.

A stone did invade the Virgin's sanctuary, and somewhat injured her nose; but Vaughan was not a nervous man, and kept his stand. Suddenly from a side street came a tall, rather bowed male figure, and Vaughan laughed heartily at the surprise and horror in the face as the new-comer discovered himself unexpectedly in the midst of this hail-storm with retreat cut off, for a frenzied onslaught of the

besieged brought a party between him and the entrance to the street up which he had passed.

The unfortunate man tried to run first one way then another, and only turned helplessly round and round like some mammoth French toy wound up by machinery. The combatants did not seem in the least aware of his presence; the stones whizzed over his head; he ducked here, skipped there; the boys ran against him; twice he was actually carried along in a rush of a small party skirmishing on the flanks.

Looking closer, Vaughan perceived that he knew the face; it was the dignified Robert Crauford, made so unwilling and alarmed a participator in this Pisan relic of Middle Age amusements. Vaughan enjoyed his absurd predicament, but it really was fraught with a great deal of danger, and it occurred to Darrell that here he had an opportunity to ingratiate himself in the elderly gentleman's favour. He had seen enough of Mr. Crauford in a single visit to know that any personal matter must always appear of vast importance to him. This fight, in which he was forced to take at least a passive share, would be the most formidable danger any human creature had ever run since the days of Thermopylæ.

So out dashed Vaughan—scattered the foes

right and left—brought them, by good round execrations in fair Italian, enough to their senses to perceive that they had cornered two strangers. The stones ceased to fly—the leaders on either side condescended to explain. Mr. Crauford recognized Vaughan, and clung to him desperately. His forehead was bleeding from a little cut. Altogether he considered the affair of such magnitude, that as soon as he could find voice he announced his intention of bringing the matter before consuls, ambassadors, the King of Italy himself, on the ground that the majesty and freedom of Columbia's happy land had been menaced in his (Robert Crauford's) august person.

While he talked, on swept the two armies along the highway, and left Vaughan to soothe the frightened man—indignant he called himself, but frightened was the adjective which more correctly expressed his appearance. He had lost his hat—it lay trampled out of all shape at the side of the road; he was covered with white dust raised by the armies; hoarse with shouting; his hands were stained with the blood which trickled from his scratch—a wound he styled it; altogether, he was in very pitiable case.

Vaughan helped him down the street till

they found a carriage; once seated therein, and a kerchief bound carefully about his bumpy forehead, Mr. Crauford could rush into ejaculations of gratitude mingled with expressions which showed that he regarded Vaughan as a very fortunate person to have been able to succour Robert Crauford, Esq. in a moment of peril.

"You did a gallant thing, sir," he said. "My life would not have been worth the purchase an instant later."

By the time they reached his house, the affair had assumed gigantic proportions, and as he had managed to smear the blood over his face, hands, and shirt-front, his appearance at first alarmed Elizabeth. Even when she discovered there was no real hurt, she felt inclined also to regard Vaughan as a hero and a friend. Darrell perceived that his morning's stroll had been a lucky business, and admired the Pisan youths for persevering in the barbaric sports of their ancestors.

So in the very beginning Mr. Crauford conceived an enthusiastic admiration for Darrell Vaughan, and speedily elevated him into a prophet and the hope of the future. It was not often that Mr. Crauford bestowed more than grudging praise or yielded other than a doubtful

belief in men's motives, but in this case all was different. Mr. Crauford seemed to have developed a need of idol worship, and he put Vaughan on the pedestal vacant in his soul.

During the first few days of his sojourn, Darrell devoted himself almost entirely to her father, and he could have chosen no course which would so rapidly have ingratiated him in Elizabeth's favour. He appeared different, in every way from young men with whom she had hitherto been thrown in contact. He neither talked frivolity nor was interested in the racing calendar, as, in her somewhat contemptuous opinion, Elizabeth had supposed must be the case with masculines under forty. Fiery denunciations of wrong and injustice—eloquent diatribes against youth wasted in idleness and elegant vice—words vague, but energetic and golden, which betrayed some deep purpose within, some lofty aim for the future, which, if necessary, he looked ready to follow out to martyrdom: such themes were often on his lips, and proved additional aids towards gaining her sympathy. She listened to this talk, never stilted or sententious, and her cheeks glowed and her heart warmed. These were the desires and motives she had

hoped to find in his age and sex, but had only met with disappointment until now.

The speeches he had delivered in Congress, the articles he had contributed to solid reviews, the addresses which created an excitement in the two great capitals, Mr. Crauford showed Elizabeth all these; it was she who read them aloud, sharing fully in her father's admiration.

"I did not think they would fall under your eyes," Vaughan said, when he came to know the facts. "How very considerate you are in everything that concerns your father; for I suppose you do not care about such matters."

"Why should I not?" she asked.

"Indeed—well, I have no reason—but I fancy young ladies do not usually. I was thinking last night you must have found me awfully dry and dull. Ever since I came here I have been riding my hobbies unconscionably; somehow Mr. Crauford's sympathy led me into it."

"I hope it may still lead you on," she answered; "and I wish you would believe in my sympathy too."

Just her pet dreams and aspirations were those which showed to be his favourite rules and plans of life: a man who meant to devote

his existence to political philanthropy—that is, one who entered politics for the express hope of doing the most good for the greatest number of his kind — it sounded wonderfully well. Then he loved books, poetry, art; he worshipped the beautiful and true in their highest forms. Elizabeth was ready to believe in her father's prophet, and bow in reverent esteem before his idol. That idol had a marvellous faculty of making Mr. Crauford see with his eyes, and yet flattering the worthy gentleman into the belief that it was by his own eagle sight both were guided.

It was impossible, of course, to avoid giving Mr. Crauford the letter which had been found among Edgar Vaughan's papers, and that letter left Elizabeth's choice unfettered between his two nephews.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Crauford, perplexed. "This is very awkward; I did not understand this."

"Because it was a delicate and painful subject, which I did not like to touch upon in my letter to you," Vaughan replied. "You will perceive that this was written only a few weeks before my uncle's illness."

"Well?"

"He made a will dividing his fortune

between us, his two nephews. New circumstances came to light, which showed him that unfortunately his first judgment of Launce Cromlin was correct; he made complete changes on that account. His whole property was left to me; if I chose, I was at liberty to pay my relative ten thousand dollars. You can judge for yourself whether he would have wished the codicil in regard to this other property to hold; only sudden illness prevented its alteration."

"Dear me!" again ejaculated Mr. Crauford.

"There is too another way of looking at it," pursued Darrell. "My uncle was a gentle-hearted man; he may have thought Launce should still have this chance for retrieving his past; whether you and your daughter would be willing to give it to him is a question for you to decide."

"Impossible! I blame your uncle; he might have—why, there is no telling what trouble he might have caused! A man who had committed a forgery—a—"

"That is a secret between us," Darrell said softly.

"And where is he now? Does he know of this matter of the will?"

"I suppose he does by this time. Carstoe and I wrote; it was our duty."

Mr. Crauford bounced about in a state of wretched excitement. "Suppose he were to hunt us up?" he asked.

"Then you would be at liberty to close your doors against him if you saw fit."

"I should think so. Why—"

"A very winning fellow is Launce; I never could resist him! Where women are concerned, I believe if they had seen him commit a murder he could manage to make it appear an heroic act."

"Good Lord!" quavered Mr. Crauford. "*Good* Lord!"

"Miss Crauford is a girl of remarkable sense and judgment," Darrell continued; "but once interest that keen sympathy of hers, and it would blind her judgment. Launce would be able to show that his uncle had come to believe in his innocence. It would not then be difficult to convince her that he had died in the belief; that the fact of the will, which in our eyes proves the contrary, went for nothing; that he would have altered it—given Launce a share of his property had there been time."

"Good *Lord!*" exclaimed Mr. Crauford, querulously.

"I learned to love your daughter before I ever saw her! I love her well enough I think —I know—to be unselfish. If I believed it were for her happiness, I could—yes, I would —bring Launce to her myself and go my way—"

"Nobody wants you to go away," interrupted Mr. Crauford. "Now don't complicate things by talking like that! O my head! What a neuralgia I shall have!"

"Of course the bare possibility of your daughter's becoming interested in such a man is painful," Vaughan said; "but the plan you suggest settles all difficulty,—your decisions are so wonderfully clear and rapid!"

Mr. Crauford looked elated and embarrassed, as a man might who had never arrived at a decision in his life; but he believed that he had here, only he was not quite certain what the resolve might have been, luminous as it appeared to his companion, so he said,—"Well?"

"Launce, I have reason to believe, is in California; once the ten thousand dollars in his hands, he will think of nothing else till he has gambled it away, so that rids you of him."

"Elizabeth would not know him; she would despise the rascal."

"If there were not several things in his favour. Let him convince her that he had suffered unjust suspicion—"

"Then what are we to do?"

"Persist in our original resolve. Say nothing whatever to Miss Crauford about my cousin. As you said, that will be the wisest course."

It was a comfort to hear a positive plan of action clearly and definitely announced; a keen pleasure, in spite of the worthy gentleman's agitation, to pounce on it as his own.

"I think we have arranged it for the best indeed," said he.

"The letter for your daughter which my uncle left is not written in a way to rouse any question; it simply speaks of the happiness it would have been to call her his niece—pleasant, general phrases, you know. The letter was sealed like yours, but Mr. Carstoe wrote at his dictation—Mr. Carstoe told me."

Mr. Carstoe had never read a syllable of either letter—was ignorant of their contents.

"It is all very odd, very troublesome," sighed Mr. Crauford.

"Yes; as you suggested, the best thing now is to put the codicil out of our heads," returned Vaughan. "You are good enough to like me, to be willing to accept me as your son-in-law

if I can succeed in winning your daughter's regard."

"That with all my heart," said Mr. Crauford, more energetically than he often spoke. It was a memorable speech from this one fact —that he never contradicted it, he who lived in an atmosphere of self-contradiction and retraction, and mental uncertainties of all sorts.

Mr. Crauford's imagination displayed just now a brilliancy which it had never done in his countless unfinished poetic efforts. He pictured to himself a being who was a cross between Mephistopheles and the Duke de Richelieu,—a man brought into the world for the express ruin and destruction of female peace in one way or another,—a creature with delightful, devilish fascinations and great talents perverted,—a mass of incongruities, which could never have held together,—and he called this figment of his fancy Launce Cromlin.

The desire that his daughter should marry Vaughan would have caused him to rush into open, unadvised partisanship, had not the astute young gentleman held him back. An odd personal motive also aided Mr. Crauford to keep silence concerning the will and provisional bequest. He had, as I have said,

always been jealous of Edgar Vaughan—jealous, that is, of the memory he believed left in his wife's mind of her earliest suitor. If Elizabeth wedded Darrell, he wished to feel that his former rival's plans and wishes had nothing to do with her decision. It would be a constant source of irritation to think that after death the man gained an influence over the daughter as he had retained while living a place in the mother's recollection.

Then, too, Mr. Crauford greatly enjoyed the possession of a secret; the sense of importance, and the absurd feeling that he was in a certain way thwarting his dead rival by excluding his expressed desires from participation in the affair, kept Mr. Crauford's little soul puffed out like the plumage of a pouter pigeon, and rendered him very happy.

The days and weeks went on.

At length a letter from Mr. Carstoe reached Darrell—it had been sent to London, and forwarded from thence by his bankers. Darrell knew that Launce Cromlin was very, very ill, and his recovery far remote, though the physicians believed that his strong constitution would ultimately conquer. So Vaughan could even rid himself of the idea that haste was necessary in the carrying out of his projects,

and his contentment nearly equalled Mr. Crauford's own.

To peripatetic Americans and English in general, Pisa is a place to visit in the interval between two trains; but to people who have sat down there in the quiet, Pisa and its environs make a delightful memory. There is a pleasant drive to the sea and the bay in which poor Shelley was drowned, with a pine-wood casting long shadows over the waters and a glorious view of Spezzia in the distance. There is a famous old Pilgrim church near where the ancient harbour of Pisa is supposed to have been — an old church, with broken marble columns and faded frescoes, erected upon the spot where Popish legends declare St. Peter first set foot on the Italian shore.

Like a thorough, understanding churchwoman, Elizabeth was prepared to refute this tale, and prove by the most credible of the primitive historians that the great disciple never left the East, but met with martyrdom upon the banks of the Euphrates, thereby destroying the very claim on which the Romish power asserts its right to sovereignty over all branches of the Catholic faith. There is a fine Carthusian monastery some six miles back among the blue Pisan hills; from thence an

excursion up a steep mountain, on whose summit are noticeable ruins — a mountain called *La Verucca*, a name suggestive of something so odious and unsightly that one never cares to translate it into English.

So the days passed pleasantly indeed, and brought about a closer companionship between Elizabeth and this man who had so unexpectedly crossed the monotonous course of her life, brightening its sameness by the charm of his presence.

Vaughan was almost constantly with them, and never had she found society so suited to her taste. His marvellous faculty of adapting himself to the habits and fancies of others served admirably here. He quickly comprehended enough of Elizabeth's enthusiastic nature to enable him to take the lead in the expression of ideas and dreams which filled her mind—doing it so well that often it seemed to her she owed their clearness and even their dawn to his suggestions. Altogether, two months passed in daily intercourse between Elizabeth Crauford and this young man. From the first she had been led to suppose his visit to Europe ordered after great and prolonged mental exertion, otherwise she would have objected to ease and repose. There was so

much work to be done in the world; its needs were so vast, that she must see a necessity for anybody's resting in order to excuse the delay.

The time came at length when she could not fail to perceive that Vaughan had some special motive in lingering with them—when it became equally plain that her father saw and approved this motive.

So a new and unknown restlessness entered Elizabeth's life, but it was a very pleasant one.

If any spirit guide could have made plain to her the fact that in this man she saw only the shadow of her lofty ideal without consistence, she would have been astounded to discover how this thought had lain at her heart and she been still ignorant of it.

She grew to believe thoroughly in Darrell Vaughan—to accept him as the embodiment of her hero who was to struggle for right, and win tangible results in the form of general good. A hero who toiled neither for fame nor ambition; who chose deliberately the hardest path,—put by the dreams which would have induced him to become either poet or artist—accepted the world's dusty high road—the hardships and wearinesses of a politician's course,—simply because the age needed a man capable of doing this for philanthropy's sake.

That she could be thought worthy to have part or lot in this grand destiny,—grand, whether success or disappointment crowned its efforts, since the aim was there, and some portion of good must be wrought,—filled her with pride and gratitude.

She believed in him—she would have shrunk from no sacrifice which might aid in his work. There was no task so humble, no drudgery so severe, that she would not have gloried in it for the work's sake.

Sometimes, even when not soaring off on the wings of hobbies and noble endeavour, there was a rare charm in his presence. At other moments the man who sat by her seemed suddenly to change. A veil lifted as it were, or a haze came between her consciousness and him. It was all vague; something she did not understand enough to dwell upon with any clearness. There were lights in those eyes sometimes—smiles on that handsome mouth—variations in his manner—twice, almost a confusion and incoherency in his talk (passing quickly, to leave a strange luminousness behind)—glances, tones, things so different from his usual seeming, that she shrank almost affrighted.

These intuitions seldom really affect us; we look back and recognize them later, but the

soul is as powerless to make its own prescience palpably felt by our mortal consciousness, as it is to put before us clear gleams of that soul's experience in lives antecedent to this—experiences which can no more have had a beginning than they can find an end, if eternity be that soul's portion.

The day came when Vaughan put his hopes into words, and then, indeed, the romance and poetry assumed their proper place, and Elizabeth the enthusiast dreamed that she was straying away into Eden, and felt no fear—only a beautiful joy at knowing her hand clasped in this man's, ready to believe her heart within reach of his for ever. Did he love her? He would have said so, and credited his own words. Vaughan could no more help longing for the possession of a beautiful woman than he could for wine, hasheesh—any excitement; and Elizabeth was a new experience. To put humanity into the statue—fire—passion—the idea was pleasant. That she would only turn into an ordinary woman if he succeeded, did not trouble him; he did not even stop to think that then she would become a weariness, and fare as others had done.

Great wealth—great reputation—boundless power—Vaughan meant to have all these.

Honour and virtue were lovely abstractions to him, like the mythological fables which clad them in glorious shapes and called them gods. Sin, as sin, was just as much an abstraction, however agreeable indulgence might be. He was as incapable of feeling shame in the gratification of his appetites as he was of remorse at flinging out of his path, by any means, an object which interfered with his course. Put spiders in a bottle, the smallest will be devoured by the next in size, and so on until there is only one bloated monster to be seen. Vaughan would not have called the conqueror a monster—he would have admired him as a visible expression of strength. He carried the same creed through all spheres of life and action. He would have told you too—if he had chosen to let you get at his secret thoughts—that any fresh sensation which the soul craved, whether upward or downward, pure or vile, was an experience offered that soul, and a part of its development. To reject the temptation because it interfered with what men term right or decency, would be an act of consummate folly and a relic of priestcraft.

When Vaughan had told the story of his love,—had dwelt on the bright future which her companionship was to render still better worth the

living,—Elizabeth asked for a week's reflection. It was all beautiful. The thought of having won such affection filled her with a sweet trouble. It was herself only that she doubted —was she worthy? Her own unfitness for marriage had been a rather firmly settled creed in her mind, but the old theories faded and lost their force now.

"I will wait any time that you set," Vaughan answered to her request. "A week—it seems a long while! Perhaps I have been too bold—it did not come from arrogance or vanity though, I am sure! Let me try to tell you how it was. My own heart was so moved, I think it seemed to me impossible that yours could remain untouched. I might have known you were too noble—too—"

Elizabeth stopped him by a little sign. A vivid colour tinted her cheeks, and her eyes looked at once earnest and disturbed. It was an effort to speak, but she struggled bravely.

"It is not that—please do not misunderstand me—it was of myself—the doubt of my own fitness—"

"Elizabeth, Elizabeth!" he cried, uttering her name for the first time as her broken sentence died unfinished; "you do care—you do!" He was bending over her; she felt his

kisses on her hands, yet this first show of passion startled and troubled her, though she could not put the feeling into words. "I beg your pardon," he said, drawing back. "Ah, can you not understand—I love you—I love you! I am only human—you have been a sort of beautiful abstraction all your life—my whole heart and soul have gone out to you and I could not call them back."

But it was not any exhibition of passion or eagerness which touched her. He saw this. Such outbursts only troubled, almost terrified her. Tenderness—calm affection—those vast plans for the future, that hope of sharing in his work—these were spells which had drawn her toward him: to their potency he must still trust.

He told her of having seen her miniature and those letters—of the dream which sprang up in his heart before their first meeting.

"I have another secret too," he added; "you must hear that now."

Then followed the story of his uncle's project, of the condition which in his will he had attached to the fulfilment of that desire.

He placed the dead man's letter in her hands, and left her to read it.

END OF VOL. I.